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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DEC., 1976
VOL. 39, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

REDHEAD AT LARGE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne is employed to solve a problem of personal pilferage with a minimum of waves. But the case balloons swiftly into a series of homicides and attempted homicides which puts the redhead in the vortex of a cyclone of murder revolving around the impending trial of an alleged husband slayer.

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REDHEAD AT LARGE

When famous defense attorney Cyril Hyndman hires the redhead, it is on a purely personal matter. But when the bullets begin to fly, Mike Shayne finds himself in the thick of Miami's number one murder case.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

ALTHOUGH HIS SUIT was a conservative banker's grey, it failed utterly to mask the flamboyance of Cyril Hyndman's personality. The world-famous Texan criminal attorney towered over Mike Shayne's six-one. His lined handsome face defied the evidence of his thick silver hair and his light blue eyes sparkled with vitality.

Nor did his openly admitted seventy-eight years in any way mitigate his anger.

"Shayne," he said, "for more than fifty years, I have been accustomed to carrying large sums of cash on my person. No one has ever ripped me off. No

one who might have done so has ever dared."

He paused to size up the red-headed detective for a long moment, then added, "Last night my pocket was picked.

Shayne said, "How much was taken?"

"Approximately twenty-five thousand dollars, give or take a couple of thousand," the attorney replied.

"Have you reported it to the police?"

"No, and I'm not going to," said the big attorney. "It would make me a laughing stock, something that has never before occurred. I am calling on

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you, as the ablest private detective in Miami to keep it private."

"I'll need more information." Shayne was still on the fence about taking the assignment although the renowned attorney was not a man easily denied.

"Of course. My assistant, Pat Barnes, is typing up a transcript of my movements last night. I don't feel I dare trust a public stenographer. While I am occupied with the Carol Winters defense, you'll deal mostly with Pat. And there is another item I want you to investigate—my wife was robbed of her carpet slippers sometime yesterday afternoon."

"Oh?" Shayne managed not to blink.

"I want them returned, if possible, once the thief is located. He paused, shook his leonine silver head fondly, added, "It's the first time in twenty years Letty has come with me to try a case outside of Texas. She's a born homebody. I was astonished when she decided to accompany me—and this has to happen to her."

Suppressing an impulse to ask why the attorney did not buy her some new slippers, Shayne said, "They have some special sentimental value, I suppose . . ."

"Sentiment be damned!"

Hyndman exploded. Then, leaning forward across the glass-topped coffee table beneath which an assortment of colorful tropical fish swam gracefully, "Shayne, from time to time some of my clients have paid me off in baubles—jewelry—pearls, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires.

"Letty loves needlework and she developed the habit of sewing these bright baubles onto her slippers. Everything but the soles is encrusted with them. It's her hobby. At a very rough guess, I'd estimate the value of her slippers at a minimum of fifty thousand."

"Seventy-five grand," said the detective, marveling at the casual way in which the famed attorney handled such large liquid assets. "That's hardly petty larceny. You should call the police."

"Meaning you can't handle it, Shayne?" The light grey eyes seemed to pin the redhead to the back of the hotel penthouse sofa on which he sat.

"Meaning, the police are both reliable and have more sources of information than I possess. Chief Gentry is an old and valued friend. I feel quite certain that—"

"*Dammit, man!*" Cyril Hyndman roared. "Someone is trying to make a laughing stock of me. I don't carry large

sums of money for amusement or out of ego. I need to have cash on me much of the time. There are occasions when only cash in large amounts can be of use—I'm sure you follow me, Shayne."

"If the thief has committed these robberies to damage your image, what's to prevent him from making it public?"

"It's not that simple," Hyndman replied. "If that alone were the purpose, I'm sure it would be public property by now. I feel certain it's being held over my head, to be revealed at some later time."

"To what purpose?" Mike Shayne asked.

The attorney wrinkled his broad forehead and shook his head, looking at the detective as if the latter were a not-too-bright child. He said, "Shayne, you must have some inkling of the fact that conducting a defense in a major capital crime trial is like walking a tightrope in a boiler factory.

"At best, the balance is delicate—it can be disturbed in any number of ways. Suppose, at some critical moment in Carol Winter's trial, it were to be bruited about publicly that Cyril Hyndman is a patsy, a sucker, an idiot who makes himself easy to rob. What would be the effect on a jury already in doubt?"

Shayne nodded but said nothing.

Hyndman ran a powerful hand through his heavy silver hair, said, "A man like me does not attain the eminence I have without making enemies. A lot of people would like to see me take a fall. Some of them would not stop at mere harassment. I have a deep bone hunch these thefts are only for starters."

He paused again, then, "Shayne, that's the real reason I called on you. Dammit, I feel my personal security is menaced. I don't like it. I want you to find who's behind it."

"It will cost you, Hyndman."

"Cost is immaterial." The attorney waved the thought away, rose and extended his right hand. "Thanks for taking it on. I feel better already, Shayne."

"I promise nothing," the redhead said.

Hyndman waved that away, too. "Get the stuff back if you can—but even if you can't, I want to know who and what is behind it. The quicker the better."

A slim young cavalier type with carefully styled dark hair knocked on the half-open door and came on in, carrying a thin sheaf of typewritten pages. This was Pat Barnes, Hyndman's legal assistant and secretary.

"It's all in here," the attorney said, handing Shayne the document. "You can take it from there. If you need more, Pat will be available here until the trial gets under way." He paused to glance at a glittering wristwatch that looked, to the detective, to be solid platinum with solid diamond lens, added, "Right now, I'm late for a conference with a key witness."

He rose and marched from the room. The impact of his overwhelming personality lingered like the silent echo of a just-vanished marching band.

II

BARNES WAITED UNTIL the attorney was safely out of earshot, then sighed and said, "He's something, isn't he?"

Mike Shayne agreed, then asked if he could talk to Mrs. Hyndman. The legal secretary led the way.

In her own way, Letty Hyndman seemed as remarkable as her husband. She, too, was big—but her most imposing dimension was lateral, not vertical. Her housecoat was rumpled, her hair none too tidy, but she evaded fat frump classification by the directness of her hazel-eyed regard, by the firmness of the hand she extended to greet the detective.

She was barefoot.

"Sit down, Mr. Shayne"—she indicated a chair as she stretched out on a lilac love seat that graced the large hotel bedroom, a large, elaboratey embroidered sewing bag on the carpet at her side—"I only wish Cyril hadn't insisted on my wearing shoes instead of my slippers when we went downstairs to luncheon yesterday."

While only a hint of Southern drawl lingered in her husband's voice, Letty Hyndman's accents dripped magnolia blossoms. She launched into a non-stop recountal of the events of the day before, concluding with, "and when I got back here, they were gone."

She looked at Pat Barnes as if for verification. He nodded and said in soft southern tones, "That's absolutely right, Letty. When I think of all those jewels and all the beautiful work you put in on them . . ." He shrugged elegantly tailored shoulders.

Letty Hyndman's face settled into lines of determination that, for all her flesh, made her look rock hard. She said, "Never mind, Pat. Never mind that." Then, softly as suddenly, to Shayne, "After all, it's water under the bridge."

The detective left shortly afterward, returning to his office to study the typed information

sheets Barnes had given him. It was late afternoon and things were quiet save for the usual routine Lucy Hamilton, his secretary, handled so efficiently.

She said, "Well, Michael?" as he entered.

He spun his snap-brim grey fedora accurately onto its usual hook on the hatrack, said, "Well, Angel, we got us a client."

She arched an eyebrow at him, holding the tip of her ballpoint against a corner of her mouth.

"Cyril Hyndman, of all people," he said.

"You mean, you're going to work on the Carol Winters case?" Lights of interest glowed suddenly in her brown eyes.

He shook his head. "No, it's personal. Excuse me, Angel, I've got some stuff to go over."

"Oh, *Michael!*" Disappointment colored her voice.

"Somebody ripped the old boy off yesterday," he told her. "Twenty-five grand. And his wife's carpet slippers."

"Oh, *no!*" she cried. "I've read about them in *Newsweek*. All those jewels!"

He went into his inner office, poured himself a Martell on the rocks and settled down at his desk.

The report Pat Barnes had typed for him seemed simple enough. Sometime the previous

day, when the Hyndmans' penthouse suite was empty, a thief had entered, obviously with key or passkey, and stolen the slippers.

Sometime the previous evening, some highly skilled footpad had picked Cyril Hyndman's right side pants pocket, removed the round roll of bills he habitually carried there and substituted a roll of note-sized cut pieces of newspaper with two fifty-dollar bills wrapped around them to conceal the theft.

Simple, simple, simple . . . or was it so simple? If the attorney had not tried to pay a nightclub tab after an evening on the town with his client, he might not have discovered the theft for a day or two.

Shayne pushed back his chair and frowned at the wall across the room.

He was beginning to get the elements of a theory for the double theft that suggested solution might not be long in coming. He reached for the phone on his desk as Lucy's monitor board buzzed, heard her say, "Yes, he's here, Tim."

Mike Shayne picked up the instrument, managed to say, "Hello, Tim," before being swamped in a deluge of invective. His old friend and drinking companion, ace crime reporter for the *Miami Daily News*,

Tim Rourke, sounded livid with anger.

He called the detective a half dozen varieties of double-crossing illegitimate with intimation of an incestuous affection for his long-dead maternal parent before concluding with, "It's not so much that you didn't tell me, but why in hell did you tip off the *Herald*? I've got egg all over my face."

Mike Shayne finally managed to learn what his friend's anger was all about—an upcoming early edition of the *Herald* with a page-three story headlined, FAMED ATTORNEY HIRES FAMED PRIVATE EYE, and subheaded, *Hyndman hires Mike Shayne to aid Winters defense*.

"For Christ's sake, Tim," the redhead replied. "I'm not *on* the Carol Winter's case. I'm working on something entirely personal."

"I'll buy that when I see penguins in Biscayne Bay," say Rourke. "See you around—but not for a while, I hope."

His desk buzzer sounded as he hung up and Lucy came on with, "It's Will, Michael. He sounds hot."

"Oh, Lord," groaned the redhead. "Might as well put him on."

Will Gentry, Miami Chief of Police, was hot—and expressed it in sarcasm with all the sub-

tlety of a herd of charging buffalo.

"Mike," he said in tones of exaggerated patience, "I know your license says you're a *private* investigator and you have every *right* to work for any client who hires you as long as it's legal." A pause, then in thundering tones, "So why in hell do you have to bust the fact you're working for Carol Winters all over the *Herald*? The D. A. is having a hemorrhage."

"I'm not *on* the case," Mike Shayne repeated.

"Horsefeathers! Then why did Hyndman hire you?"

"I can't tell you that," Shayne replied.

"I thought so." Gentry's sarcasm redoubled.

"I didn't give out the story, Will."

"Who did—Cyril Hyndman?"

"I wish to hell I knew," said the redhead.

"Don't expect much cooperation from us for a while, Mike." The Police Chief's hangup was definitive.

Mike Shayne sat there, pondering his unexpected dilemma, wondering who in hell had upset the pot by tipping the *Herald* to the false story. He resolved to get back to the attorney and find out if he still had a job.

It was not that he needed

Hyndman's money or that his assignment looked especially difficult. He wanted to know who was responsible for the leak—and why. Telling Lucy to lock up he went downstairs to where his Buick was parked in front of the building.

A flash of late-afternoon sunlight on something across the street to his left, caused Shayne to turn his head that way—just in time to see it flash flame and feel the whir of a bullet inches from his right ear.

The redhead hit the deck as the missile dug a hole in the granite door frame and burst, peppering him with fragments of rock.

There was no sound of the shot audible above the normal street noises, noises submerged by the shrill squeal of tires on pavement as a car pulled from the opposite curb in a hurry and threaded its way swiftly through the modest traffic, followed by another squeal as it slued right on two wheels around the next corner.

Mike Shayne did not even get a look at the speeding car's license plate.

III

THE KEY FACTOR, Shayne decided, lay in the timing. He had been summoned to Cyril Hyndman's palatial penthouse

hotel suite by telephone shortly before two o'clock that afternoon. Allowing time for driving to and from his office on Flagler across the bay, his interviews with the attorney, his legal secretary and his wife had lasted approximately two hours. Shayne had been in his office less than an hour before coming downstairs to be shot at on the sidewalk below.

It was now five forty-one by the Buick dashboard clock.

Keeping a wary eye for a possible tail in the rearview mirror as he tooled through traffic back across the causeway for Miami Beach, the redhead considered the implications of the news leak to the *Miami Herald* that had aroused the anger of both Tim Rourke and the Miami chief of police.

It was possible, if the information about his being hired by the defense attorney had been given the paper immediately on his leaving Hyndman's apartment, for the story to have hit the street as swiftly as it had. Justly barely possible—but only if the editor had issued a stop-press order for an immediate page three replate.

Although the Carol Winters trial was sensational enough to merit a lot of journalistic attention, the redhead's alleged involvement was hardly earth-shaking enough to justify such

expensive expedients. This suggested to the detective that the information must have been leaked even before his interview with Hyndman.

Why? Another good question as yet unanswered—and by whom? Shayne pondered the problem as he inched through the growing rush-hour traffic, then shelved it pending another session with the attorney.

He suspected the attempted hit had resulted from the breaking of the story. The obvious haste with which it had been set up was revealed by the fact that he was still alive. At that, it had been close—too damned close.

Which suggested something else he was resolved to ask the silver-haired lawyer . . .

"Mr. Hyndman," he said when the proper moment arose as the two men again sat across the coffee table in the living room of the attorney's suite, "have you had time to give consideration to the fact that someone attempted to kill me?"

"Or tried to scare you off, Shayne." Hyndman's rich baritone was gentle, almost mocking.

The redhead shook his head, said, "It was too close for a scare try. The whole thing was too hasty. It smells to me like a desperation attempt to keep me off the case."

"But you're not *on* 'the case'." The attorney's brow furrowed.

"You and I know that," said the detective. "But the *Herald* obviously didn't know it—which means whoever ordered the hit didn't know it. Does that suggest anything to you, Hyndman?"

The lawyer sighed, lifted his glass and drained four full ounces of barely diluted 100-proof Old-Grandad, said, "What does it suggest to you, Shayne?"

"Hyndman," the redhead said bluntly, "is Carol Winters innocent or guilty of murdering her husband?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the attorney with a slow smile.

"You *what*?" Shayne couldn't believe his ears.

"Dear man," said Hyndman. "When I accept a murder case I always operate on one presumption—that my client is guilty as hell. If he—or she—were innocent, why the devil would they want to hire an attorney as expensive as I am?"

"Does Mrs. Winters claim she's innocent?" Shayne asked.

"That's privileged information, young man," the attorney replied. "And you know it. But I don't see how my telling you can harm my client. Of course, she claims she's innocent."

"You don't believe her?"

Cyril Hyndman spread hands

the size of picnic hams. He said, "How can I? Ninety-nine percent of my clients insist they are pure as the proverbial driven snow. Damn few of them are."

The detective was fascinated and puzzled. He said, "I don't see how you can defend a client you don't believe."

"Dear detective man, I don't defend a client. If I did, I'd lose most of my cases. Out of one hundred and seven murder trials, I have only lost one client to the hangman—and that was at the outset of my career."

"What do you do then—or is it a secret, Hyndman?"

"It's hardly a secret," the lawyer replied. "I don't defend a client, I put the prosecution on trial in front of the jury. I don't defend, I attack—rather, I counter-attack. The trick is to put the prosecution on the defensive. Invariably, they make mistakes. They're not accustomed to the role."

He let it hang. Mike Shayne could only shake his red head in admiration. Then, he said, "I'd like to talk to your client myself, if it's possible."

Cyril Hyndman frowned. "My first impulse is to refuse. But since you feel this idiotic attempt on your life may spring from the murder of which she stands accused, I shall try to

arrange such a meeting—always providing that I am present, of course."

He reached for the telephone . . .

IV

A BRISK RED-HEADED lady warden brought Carol Winters into a little room of the Dade County Penitentiary designed for private conferences between inmates awaiting trial and their attorneys. She indicated a pushbutton on the green metal table, said, "Press this when you're finished," then departed. The door clicked firmly shut behind her.

It was the first time the detective had seen the accused husband-slayer in the flesh. She, too, was something—although a far cry from the intended usage of that word when Hyndman's secretary had employed it to describe his employer.

There are as many varieties of blonde hair as there are shades of light rinse on drugstore or supermarket shelves—but the burnished gold of Carol Winters's tresses did not look to Shayne as if it came from a plastic bottle. Nor were her matching eyebrows the work of a pencil. Save for a bright slash of lipstick, expertly applied, her face looked inno-

cent of any variety of makeup.

Nor did the body beneath its simple-expensive light blue linen cover appear to need artificial help. Her smile as she greeted her visitors revealed twin rows of ivory white teeth.

Mike Shayne found himself thinking, *My God! She's for real!* A young woman without visible artifice, perhaps because she needed none.

She stood on tiptoe to kiss the silver haired attorney and softly say, "Bless you, darling." Then, to the detective, "I'm so glad you're going to work for us, Mr. Shayne."

Hyndman's eyebrows went up. His expression, which had been that of a famine victim confronting a sirloin steak with all the trimmings, became one of mild distress.

He said, "But Carol, Mr. Shayne is not working for us—he's working for *me*."

"Isn't that the same thing, Cyril dear?" she asked.

"Not quite." The attorney hesitated and Shayne sensed that this was a rare occasion when Hyndman found himself at a loss for words.

The detective said, "Tell me, Mrs. Winters, when you learned of my employment by Mr. Hyndman."

She frowned—delightfully as she did everything else—then said, "Oh dear, it was hours

ago. Let's see, Alice told me when she came to visit, around three o'clock." Another pause, then, for Mike Shayne's benefit, "Alice is my stepdaughter, Alice Danforth."

The attorney frowned. "Carol, dear," he said, "I told you about seeing visitors without consulting me first."

"But she just *came*," Carol Winters protested. "How could I send her away? After all, I have no right to expect loyalty from any of Josh's family until this horrible thing is cleared up."

Hyndman opened his mouth to speak but before he could clear a syllable, she said, turning back to Shayne, "And I know you're going to clear it all up, Mr. Shayne. You see, whatever you may have heard, I did not murder my husband."

The attorney must have pressed the table buzzer, for the female warden appeared promptly and little more was said. Minutes later, the detective was driving the lawyer back toward his hotel. They drove in silence most of the way.

Then Cyril Hyndman said, "If Carol only weren't so God damned headstrong. Well, Shayne, what do you think?"

"A doll," the detective replied. "An absolute living doll."

"Oh, she's that, all right." The attorney sighed, then added, "Dammit, man, what do you *think*?"

Mike Shayne knew what his client meant. He considered it for a long moment, then said, "Hyndman, I'm not usually a fool over a pretty face, but I have a feeling she's innocent."

"Hah!" the attorney grunted. "*Innocent*?"

The redhead's already half-formed impression of a deeper than client-attorney relationship between Hyndman and Carol Winters was firmed by the attorney's cryptic comment. He recalled hearing or reading somewhere that Cyril Hyndman was not above accepting personal bonuses of a non-financial nature from his female defendants.

There had been something—in the tone of Carol's voice, in her attorney's inflections—that suggested a more personal involvement, perhaps achieved in the preliminary phase of the case before her arrest. For some reason, Shayne thought of Letty Hyndman, almost as broad and thick as she was tall, mourning her stolen carpet slippers.

Instead of taking the elevator upstairs to his penthouse suite when they reached the hotel, the attorney invited Shayne into a downstairs bar for a

drink. The two men sat silent at a secluded corner table until the tall frosted juleps Hyndman had ordered were served. The attorney sipped his cautiously, found it satisfactory, downed half of it at a single quaff, put down his glass and looked at the detective.

"So you think she didn't kill him?" he said. "Why?"

Mike Shayne shrugged. "It's something that's developed over the years. Almost like an aura—it's hard to explain. And it doesn't always pan out."

"But you felt it from her?"

The detective nodded, took a healthy swallow of his own drink, found it a pleasant variation from his usual Martell and water. "I felt it."

"Strongly enough to gamble on it?"

Shayne waited.

Hyndman said, "Suppose you prove she's guilty—could I rely on you to keep your findings confidential until the trial is over?"

Shayne moved to rise and leave the table—the attorney restrained him with a hand the size of a fielder's glove. "I'd apologize except that I never do." His tone was contrite. "Don't quit now—you've only just begun to work on the case."

The redhead finished his drink, then rose again. To Hyndman's unspoken query, he

replied, "I'm going to pay a call on Alice Danforth. I want to find out how *she* heard I was on the case before three o'clock.

The attorney nodded. "Keep in touch," he said, "and I'd still like my money and Letty's slippers back."

Mike Shayne was two thirds of the way back across the Causeway when he realized that he was being tailed. The early-evening traffic was relatively light, which was why he was able to spot a pursuer at all. Not until he passed a slow-moving truck and half-consciously noted a car well back of him do the same thing while maintaining its distance did he become suspicious.

The near-miss of the street sniper that afternoon came vividly to mind and he could feel again the bits of concrete peppering him as the bullet ricocheted. The red hairs at the back of his neck stiffened as he put the pursuer to another traffic test with similar results.

Whoever was driving the following car knew what he was doing—another factor that did little to reassure him. He reached for the special dashboard compartment and snugged his .45 into its shoulder holster.

Meanwhile, he considered ways and means of eliminating his pursuer, who continued to

remain a discreet distance behind the Buick. This failure to close the gap enabled the detective to work out a little scheme to shake the nuisance.

When he reached the Miami end of the long bridge over the bay, he cut sharply to the right on an early side street, then cut right again into a darkened alley and turned off his car lights, before the car following had time to make the turn. With a hand on the grip of his pistol and his eyes on the rear-view mirror, he waited.

Seconds later, a car went past the alley mouth at medium speed, then picked up velocity as it turned the next corner. Shayne kicked the Buick into reverse and backed out of the alley . . . directly into the path of a low-slung foreign import also heading in from the Causeway.

There was a hideous screech of brakes and tires as this third vehicle ground to a halt with its bumper mere inches from T-boning the detective's heavier car. The headlamps flooded him as he put the Buick in drive and sent it back into the alley . . . and again a gun crashed and a bullet whined past him, missing the back of his red head by only the slight forward motion of the car.

There had been two cars on his tail . . .

V

MIKE SHAYNE DUCKED LOW over the wheel as two other shots shattered the silence of the night and two more bullets sang behind him, penetrating the rear of the car without ricochetting. There was a brief letup as he reached the shelter of the alley and the redhead took full advantage of it.

Opening the door at his left as wide as the alley wall permitted, he slid from the seat, pushed the door nearly shut and squeezed past, then opened it again to serve as a shield. The motor of the sports car roared briefly as it rolled forward to block the alley mouth. With the headlights of the second pursuer no longer blinding him, he caught a brief glimpse of a figure behind the wheel and fired back for the first time.

A yelp of anguish and alarm told him the bullet had hit something. A small black object flew through the air to strike the rear luggage compartment of the Buick with a loud clang. Taking careful aim, Mike Shayne fired again—but missed as the sports job went suddenly into reverse and withdrew from the fray.

The ominous shrill of a siren told the detective why. He slammed the Buick door shut

and darted to the mouth of the alley just in time to see his would-be assassin back around the corner out of sight to his right. To his left, an unmarked detective car with headlights ablaze ground to a halt in front of him.

The police car paused long enough for a man to get out, then sped on its way. The man approached the redhead with drawn Magnum, said, "You okay?"

"I'm all right, Lou," Shayne replied, recognizing Detective-Sergeant Lou Jacobs, one of the younger officers of Captain and Chief of Detectives Len Sturgis. "Hope your boy can catch the so-and-so."

"What in hell happened?" Sergeant Jacobs asked.

Mike Shayne said, "I wanted to shake a tail so I cut in here."

"You shook us, okay," Jacobs replied. "What was that shooting all about?"

"Somebody else was tailing me," the redhead said. He was torn between anger at the police for having put a tail on him and gratitude for their return to help him out of what had seemed still to be a very tough spot.

He began to look around in the dimly lit street for the object that had flown from the would-be killer's hand and bounced off the Buick's rear

deck. Holstering his revolver, Sergeant Jacobs joined him to find it the hard way—by stepping on it and turning his ankle.

The object was a .38 caliber Walther automatic with a long target barrel. Picking it up, Shayne handed it to Jacobs, who accepted it while massaging his ankle with his other hand. "Damn it, Shayne," he said. "You may have mussed up some fingerprints."

"You've got to be kidding," the redhead replied. "You know as well as I do, no gun has produced a fingerprint worth a damn in court in the history of the Miami Police Department."

"There's always the chance." Sergeant Jacobs was too new-minted as a detective not to go by the Police Academy rule-book. Then he said, "I ought to phone in."

"Be my guest." Shayne backed the Buick out of the alley and Jacobs got in and used the radio phone. After a brief exchange, he handed it to the redhead, saying, "Captain wants to talk to you."

"Better come in and tell me about it," Len Sturgis said.

"Dammit, I'm on a case," the redhead protested. "I've got other things to do."

"Come on in—and bring Jacobs with you."

Mike Shayne argued no fur-

ther. When hulking Len Sturgis took on *that* tone, there was no point in arguing. He drove Jacobs to Miami Police Headquarters. They were taken directly to the Chief of Detectives' office. Looking even larger and more unkempt than usual, Sturgis was growling into a telephone.

"What do you mean, you lost him, Anderson?" The big man ran a hand through his disordered greying hair. "Where were Luders and O'Hara?" Then, after a moment, "This is really your night to foul, Anderson. Come on in—and try not to get lost."

He dropped the handset into its cradle, looked at Shayne and repeated the question Jacobs had asked. "Shayne, what in hell happened?"

The detective told him, sticking to the two attempted shootings. Sturgis frowned when he told them of the murder try outside his office that afternoon. The big man said, "I don't suppose you reported it."

"Didn't have time," the redhead replied. "I'm reporting it now, Sturgis."

The hulking captain accepted this sullenly, motioned for Shayne to continue. When it was over, he looked at Jacobs and said, "Is that it?"

"Just about, sir; as far as I know."

"Let's see the gun, sergeant."

Jacobs handed it over. Sturgis studied it, sniffed the muzzle, checked chamber and magazine, handed it back, said, "Take it for testing, sergeant."

When he had gone, Sturgis leaned forward across his desk and said, "Why'd you do it, Mike?"

"Do what?"

"That damn story this afternoon. The D.A. got on Will's neck and the Chief got on mine. Your buddy Rourke of the *News* is threatening murder or hari kiri."

"For Pete's sake, Len," Shayne protested, "I didn't have a damn thing to do with that story. I wasn't even on the Carol Winters thing when it appeared. When the shooting started tonight, I was on my way to try and find out who leaked it and why." He paused, added, "Why'd the D.A. get so hot about it anyway?"

"Look at it from his point of view," said Sturgis. "I'll grant you he has a low boiling point but that's neither here nor there. You met the Winters broad today. Now he's got a damn near open-and-shut case against her, but if Cyril Hyndman puts her on the stand—and I'm betting this time he will—the prosecution is going to have one hell of a time convincing the jury she's



guilty."

Mike Shayne nodded, well remembering the aura of innocence, to say nothing of the beauty, Carol Winters radiated. He said, "You're sure she's guilty then?"

"You're damned right I'm sure. My department put the case together for the D.A.'s office. Like I said, it's open and shut. Beautiful young wife—no loot to speak of—husband twenty years older with a couple of million in the bank.

"Add an old boyfriend she jilted for Joshua Winters, a man near her own age who keeps hanging around. Add a near bankruptcy in the boy-

friend's business. Add separate bedrooms. Add one very dead Joshua Winters found by the maid shot to death in his own bed. What do you get?"

"Shayne said, "Weapon?"

"Not found—yet. But the house is on a marina and she could have taken it out in the bay and dumped it before her husband's body was found."

"What about the old boyfriend?" Shayne asked.

"Unshakable alibi—he was in New Orleans at the time. Don't worry—we checked it out. We'd a hell of a lot rather try *him* than the beautiful widow."

"Nobody heard the shot?"

"Nobody. When and if we find the gun, it will have a silencer on it."

"In other words, the case is not quite so open and shut as the D.A. wants." The redhead tugged at the lobe of an ear. "But why so hot over my being in it—and I *am* in it now, thanks to that damn story."

"You know how many prosecution murder cases you've knocked out over the years, Mike?" said Sturgis.

"Only in the interest of justice and truth." Shayne assumed as virtuous an expression as his rugged, somewhat battered face permitted.

"Oh, get the hell out of here before I commit murder," the chief of detectives growled.

"Am I still wagging a tail?" "i'm calling it in." Sturgis reached for his desk phone, paused to add, "But you ought to be damned thankful we had a car after you just now. You might have got killed."

"Could be." The redhead smiled. "But just for the record, Len, if the prisoner is so damned guilty, why the attempt to rub me out? Unless the D.A.'s set some of his goons on me."

Sturgis lifted the phone as if to throw it at Shayne, who said, "Think that over, Len."

When he departed, the chief of detectives was sitting hunched over, his cheeks in his hands, wearing the worried expression of an emperor-sized bassett hound.

VI

IT WAS CLOSE UPON ten o'clock when Mike Shayne left Police Headquarters and headed for the address of Alice Danforth as given him by Cyril Hyndman. The two bullet holes in the back of the Buick annoyed him, the attempts on his life made him resolve to tread warily—but the biggest puzzle confronting him was still the mysteriously swift leakage of his hiring to the *Miami Herald*.

He considered going directly to the *Herald* city room to en-

quire but had his doubts about collecting information from that source. The paper was noted for zealously guarding its sources and, in penalty for his close friendship with Tim Rourke of the rival gazette, Shayne was not exactly persona grata with the *Herald* staff.

At the moment, he had no desire to try to get the time of night out of Rourke. When his old friend really got angry, it usually took him a day or two to return to reason.

The Danforth house was set well back from the street in a parklike area of Miami proper that featured lawns and hedges, tall palms and slender cypresses. Save for carriage-lamp light fixtures on either side of the front door, the house was dark.

Mike Shayne walked up a graveled driveway that led to a rear garage, along a flagged path to the red brick doorsteps. He tugged at a shining brass doorpull, heard the bell chime inside, stood there awaiting the switching on of interior lights that would indicate someone was coming in answer to his ring.

No lights went on. Nobody came.

After an interval during which his third ring went unanswered, the detective tried the door, found it locked.

Slowly, he walked back to the driveway, debating whether he should go home to get some sleep or wait in the Buick parked on the street outside. Before turning his back on the house, he looked to his left along the driveway toward the two car garage at its end.

The garage door was up. From what he could see in the near-darkness, one of its stalls was empty. For lack of any better employment at the moment, he moved toward it to take a look. The car inside was a Mercedes sedan and its radiator was cool. Save for the litter along the walls of old tires and tools and cartons every private garage seems to accumulate, it contained nothing worthy of note that he could see in the dim light.

He turned to walk back to the street, resolved to waste no more time trying to see Alice Danforth this night, when he spotted the back door of the house, at the top of a trio of wooden steps flanked with trashcans, and decided to give it a try. To his surprise, the doorknob turned easily in his hand and the door silently opened inward.

As silently, Mike Shayne slipped into the kitchen. The curtains were not drawn, and there was sufficient light from outside so that he was able to

move about without stumbling over the furniture. A swinging door led into a pantry, another into a dining room, beyond which lay a front hall.

Unless someone were sleeping upstairs—which he doubted, since the hour was still shy of eleven—the house was empty. Now that he was inside, Shayne felt a bit foolish, wondering what he was doing there and considering the possible consequences if any of the Danforths or their servants returned and found him there.

He had just decided to beat a retreat when he heard the sound of a car coming to a halt in the driveway outside. He remained where he was, trying to determine whether the new arrival would use the back or front door—so that he could take the alternate route.

Steps sounded on the flagged path outside and the redhead's right hand gripped the gun in its holster. He took a step backward in retreat, paused as curiosity swept over him, curiosity as to the newcomer.

He had just reminded himself that discretion was the better part of valor when a key sounded in the front door and it was too late. He was barely able to slip behind one of the drapes that bordered the dining room entrance when the door

was flung open and the hall light switched on.

There was the sound of a quick intake of breath, then silence.

As it continued, the detective's curiosity rose again and he risked taking a peek around the curtain.

A tall young man with sandy hair stood just inside the front door, his gaze riveted on something away from Shayne and just out of sight.

Something in the fixity of the newcomer's regard caused the detective to tighten his grip on the Colt beneath his left shoulder. Literally risking exposure by sticking his neck out, the redhead turned his head to follow the young man's gaze.

A staircase rose from the rear of the hall and there was a body on it—the body of a beautifully dressed young man sprawled, face up, with its head on the hall carpet and its well shod feet well up on the lower staircase.

Even at that distance, Shayne recognized the corpse. It was the body of Pat Barnes.

There was a bullet hole almost in the center of his forehead.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE PULLED BACK his head and got the hell out of the

Danforth house as rapidly as silence permitted. Luckily, most of the dining room was blanketed by thick carpeting, and he was able to make his escape from the house without arousing sounds of pursuit.

Outside, he avoided the graveled driveway, lest his footfalls give him away, by walking along the clipped grass that bordered it. He passed the car that had just driven in, a lowslung Porsche that reminded him of the job that had followed him to the alley from the Causeway earlier that evening.

Gently, he got the well-turned Buick going and, tooling it past the Danforth house, turned to the right at the next intersection, then U-turned and parked facing the street he had just left. This maneuver gave him a good nocturnal view of the house, from which he was an approximate 100 yards away.

At no time did he turn on his car lights. Nor did he light up a cigaret, something he very much wanted, remembering from the war how far the glowing tip of a lighted smoke was visible at night.

He picked up the radio-telephone, called Cyril Hyndman at his hotel and told the flamboyant attorney that his secretary was dead.

"I don't believe it!" the lawyer replied. Then, swiftly regaining his self control, "How'd it happen?"

"Shayne told him what little he knew, and Hyndman said, "Have you called the police?"

"Not yet," the detective replied. "I want to see if the other guy does that. Anyway, I don't want to be caught here if they come."

"It would be most unwise," said the attorney, matter-of-factly. "When you do find out, take off."

"Any instructions?" Shayne asked.

"You'll hardly have a chance to talk to Alice Danforth tonight," was the dry response. Then, "Poor bastard! Letty will be shattered."

Hyndman hung up and the detective put in a call to Tim Rourke, who was working a late shift at the *News*. Again, the reporter came on with a burst of profanity until the redhead cut him short with, "Forget it, Tim, you want a beat?"

"You owe me one," Rourke replied. His anger abating under the lure of a possible scoop.

When Shayne told him about the murder, Rourke shook his head and said, "Thanks, Mike—we're even."

"The hell we are!" the red-

head retorted. "You could have believed me this afternoon."

"Get off the line," Rourke told him. "I'm going to be busy. See you tomorrow at the usual."

Not long after he put the radio-telephone back in its cradle, the detective heard the growl of a siren growing rapidly louder as a police car approached. Shayne waited till he saw it pull to a halt in front of the Danforth house, then put the Buick in motion again and got clear of the area, not turning on his car lights until he was several blocks away:

He was going home to put in a quiet night—he hoped.

As he drove, he tried to sort out the crowded events of the afternoon and evening and make some sort of sense of them. There had been the first interview with Cyril Hyndman and his accepting the assignment to try to run down the theft of the attorney's bankroll and of his wife's jeweled house slippers.

There had been his brief interview with Pat Barnes and Letty and her bemoaning the fact that her husband had insisted she wear shoes to go to luncheon the previous day. The detective wondered if Mrs. Hyndman customarily ate out in her famous slippers . . .

There had been his return to

the office to study Pat Barnes' report on the slim known facts of the theft. Then had come the successive calls from Tim Rourke and Will Gentry, blasting him for permitting the *Herald* to publish the then-false story that he was employed on behalf of the defendant in the Winters murder case.

There had been the first attempt on his life as he left the office, his second interview with Cyril Hyndman, their visit to Carol Winters in the county jail consultation room, his subsequent hiring by Hyndman to work for the defendant. There had been the second attempt on his life in the alley, his visit to Len Sturgis, finally his trip to the Danforth house leading to the discovery of Pat Barnes' body by a sandy haired young man whose identity as yet remained unknown to the detective.

The only sensible conclusion he could draw from these swift-paced happenings was that somebody—identity also as yet unknown—wanted him off the case so badly that he or she was willing to kill for it.

Why?

A damned good question, he decided, but one to which he had not the slightest hint of an answer.

All at once, Mike Shayne realized that he was raven-

ously hungry—he had not eaten since noon—and with a thirst to match. Since it was still shy of midnight, he headed for The Beef House on Miami Avenue, his long-time favorite restaurant-saloon.

Again, as he drove, it occurred to him that if he could unravel the source of the news leak to the *Herald* that afternoon, with its all but prescient timing, he might at least be on his way to a peripheral crack in what now looked like an unfathomable mystery.

Pat, the stout Irish barkeep with the rare-beef complexion, caught Shayne's eye as he entered and winked. The detective made a gesture of pouring a bottle into a glass, then pointed to the restaurant booths in the rear. He had barely seated himself in the back booth he and Rourke favored when Jennie, the pert brunette waitress, appeared with a tray containing a fifth of Martell, a bowl of ice, a glass and a pitcher of water.

After thanking her, he ordered a twenty-four ounce steak, charcoaled and rare, O'Brien potatoes, bacon, mushrooms, French fried onion rings, toasted rolls and a bowl of lettuce and tomatoes with French dressing.

Jennie shook her head in wonderment as she took the or-



der, then said, "If I ate half of that, I'd put on ten pounds. Some people have all the luck."

"Just stay as sweet as you are, Jennie," the redhead told

her. "I may have to jog this off for a week."

"Not you, Mr. Shayne," she countered. Then, "Is it true you're on the Winters case?"

"If you can believe the newspapers," he replied. "Tell Fritz not to take all night with the food. I'm starved."

VIII

TO SHAYNE'S SURPRISE, Tim Rourke arrived with the food. The cadaverous reporter crowded his long lank frame into the opposite side of the booth and poured himself a generous belt of cognac, which he drained neat.

The detective said, "What the hell are you doing here, Tim? I thought you'd be out at the Danforth place."

"The fuzz has it buttoned down all the way," Rourke replied, his expression dour. "You sure Pat Barnes was murdered?"

"When I saw him, he was lying upside down on the staircase with a bullet hole in the center of his forehead."

"Who gave the alarm—you?" the reporter asked.

"Not so you'd notice. Another gentleman got there ahead of me—a tall young man with sandy hair and a surprised expression—which may not be his habitual one. Any idea who

that could possibly be, Tim?"

"Sounds like Ben Winters, the late Josh Winters' son by his first wife. Not that you gave much of a description."

"It's probably him," the redhead said. "At least he had a key to the house."

"How did you get in, Mike?"

Shayne told him, then said, "For God's sake, Tim, keep me out of it for now, Will Gentry's still smoking about that damned *Herald* story and Len Sturgis is breathing down my neck. They seem to think I know something they don't."

"Somebody else thinks that, too," said Rourke.

"Oh?"

"I heard about the shootout in the alley. Our headquarters man picked it up."

"*Brother!*" said Shayne. "I wish to hell I knew what it was. That was try number two today."

It was the reporter's time to raise eyebrows. He said, "Watch your step, Mike. Wonder why they're so hot about you being on it."

"Even before I was on it."

Tim said, "Sorry I blew my gourd over that."

"Stow the apology and let me eat," the redhead told him. "This food is getting cold. And order yourself a drink while you're at it. I may want some of this brandy myself."

Two thirds of the way through his steak, Shayne laid down his knife and fork and said, "Tim, what do you know about the late Pat Barnes?"

"Not a hell of a lot, Mike." The reporter paused to down a couple of ounces of his tall rye highball. "The poop has it that he was some sort of distant relation of Hyndman's wife—like her, he comes from Louisiana. Supposed to be a bright young attorney. Old Cyril wouldn't have hired him if he weren't."

The detective thought that over, recalling his client's remark on learning of his death—"Letty will be shattered." He began to see a somewhat clearer pattern of possibility involving the double-rioff for which he had originally been hired by the famed trial lawyer.

But how it connected up with Barnes' murder remained a mystery. If the Danforths remained friendly to Carol Winters, he supposed there could be a number of reasons for the dead man's presence in their house. But why kill him there? And what, if anything, had brought Ben Winters there at that particular time?

"What about Ben Winters?" Shayne asked.

"He's the son who's taken over the old man's insurance business," the reporter replied.

"Another bright young man, according to rumor."

"What's his attitude toward the defendant?"

Rourke shrugged and reached for a smoke. After lighting it, he said, "He's the close-mouthed member of the family. His sister Alice—well, to put it mildly, she's the outgoing type."

The detective nodded, then said, "How about Alice's husband—what's his name, Lee Danforth?"

"An underwriter for the firm. Rumor has it that he's a bit of a playboy. The Danforth attitude toward Carol Winters is supposed to be friendly—, Alice Danforth doesn't think Carol killed the old man, and husband Lee goes along."

"You say her husband's a playboy?" the redhead asked. "Where does he do his playing?"

"Mostly the Beach hotels, I hear. He does a lot of client entertaining—you know, wine, dine, floor shows, broads, the whole ungruesome bit."

"He sounds pretty out-going himself."

"I suppose so. I don't know a lot about him. But I doubt that he's a chatterbox like his missus. After all, he's a businessman."

Shayne got back to the steak. As he speared another bite, he

said, "Sturgis mentioned the fact that Carol has, or had, a boyfriend. What about him?"

"Name's Warren—Jack Warren. He's officially in the clear as far as the murder is concerned."

"Officially? What does that mean?"

"Nothing special—just that the police checked out his alibi," Rourke replied.

"Did you interview him?"

"I've talked to all of them. Warren *seems* okay. He's a media adman turned promoter. Introduced Carol Winters—she was Carol Brown then—to her husband."

Shayne swallowed another bit of beef and speared an onion ring. "What was her relationship to Warren after the marriage, Tim?"

"My educated guess is that she's played the 'just friends' bit." He paused, reached for his glass. "But you never know."

"Len implied his business was in trouble at the time of the Josh Winters murder."

The reporter swallowed, shrugged, put down his tumbler. "He's an up-and-down type—a promoter who hasn't really got it made. A nice enough little guy, I guess. But he's been down before and bounced back." A pause; then, "Mike, you haven't told me why in hell you're a target in this thing."

"That's right," the redhead agreed, "and there's a damn good reason. I don't know—yet."

"You'd better find out before whoever's doing it makes it stick."

"You're telling me!"

Mike Shayne finished his steak and made a sizable dent in what was left of the cognac. The heavy meal, and the drink, had relaxed him. He was happy to be on good terms again with Tim, whom he valued not only as a friend but for his vast fund of information about persons and happenings in the Miami area. As they went over the case again, he pondered the list of possible suspects apart from the defendant.

There were four of them at the moment—Ben Winters, Lee and Alice Danforth and Jack Warren.

He wondered which of them had been sufficiently alarmed by his involvement in the investigation to be driven to attempted murder. Not to mention the actual murders of both Joshua Winters and Pat Barnes . . .

He decided to go home and sleep on it.

IX

ALICE DANFORTH WAS a tall / brownette with blue eyes and a

quick smile. Beneath her ready greeting for the detective, Shayne could feel high nervous tension—understandably under the circumstances. After all, Pat Barnes had been murdered in her house the night before. There were circles under her eyes that betrayed a lack of sleep—also understandable. A police car was still parked discreetly outside, down the street.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but the house is a mess. I'm having the cleaners in tomorrow—the police won't let me disturb anything today."

"I understand," Mike Shayne replied. "But it doesn't look messy to me."

"Oh, but it is!" She made a quick unhappy gesture, then added, "Would you like some coffee?"

He accepted and she summoned a maid-servant and gave the orders, said, "If we only hadn't gone out last night, poor Pat might still be alive."

"And you or your husband might be dead." Mike Shayne wanted to jolt her before he began to question her.

Her clasped hands went to her jaw. "Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "Poor Ben—that's my brother—he found the ... He found Pat's body, lying there, head down. It must have been awful."

"It's never nice," said Shayne.

"But that's not why I'm here, Mrs. Danforth."

"No?" Her blue eyes question him.

"I'm curious about something else—how did you find out so early yesterday that I was being hired by Mr. Hyndman?"

"Oh!" Her expression went blank, then cleared. "Let me see ... Oh! I remember. It was poor Pat—he called me from the hotel. He knew I'd be glad to hear about you, Mr. Shayne. He knew how anxious I am to have Carol cleared of that ridiculous charge."

"When was it he called, Mrs. Danforth?"

"Oh"—another blank, then recovery—"it must have been around one o'clock. I had lunch here with some friends."

"Thank you." Shayne spoke simply. Then, "You didn't by any chance give the news to the *Herald*?"

She shook her head, said, "I don't know anybody at the *Herald*—or on any other newspaper, either."

The coffee came and was excellent, even unlaced with brandy. Putting down his cup, Mike Shayne said, "Do you have any idea what brought Pat Barnes here last night?"

"Not really. He didn't speak to me about it." She bit her lip, close to tears, recovered. "He was such a *nice* young man. So

polite and always so obliging."

"What about your brother?"

"Oh, he spends the night here sometimes, when he has to be at the office early. He has his own doorkey and room upstairs."

"I see."

"Poor Letty must be devastated," Alice Danforth went on. "She was so fond of Pat—he was a relative, you know."

"So I heard last night. How about you and the Hydmans?" Shayne dropped it casually.

"I *love* Letty Hyndman! She's so down-to-earth."

"And Cyril?"

Alice Danforth wrinkled her nose. "Oh, he's okay, I suppose," She frowned. "But he's sort of overwhelming, if you know what I mean." She looked at him anxiously.

He smiled reassurance, nodded, said, "Well, I'll be going Mrs. Danforth. Thank you for the coffee."

At the door, she squeezed his hand, said, "I *do* hope you will help clear poor Carol. She wouldn't kill a fly, much less my father. She was a perfect wife for dad, and that wasn't always easy."

Shayne left the Danforth house and drove back into town. It was late morning, and he wanted to check things at the office before having a talk with Letty Hyndman. When he

got there, a turtleneck type in slacks and a tweed jacket was waiting for his arrival.

"Boss, this is Mr. Warren," Lucy said.

"Come on inside." Mike Shayne led the way to the inner office, sailed his hat accurately onto a hook near the top of the hat tree in the corner. "Sit down, Mr. Warren. What can I do for you?"

Jack Warren hesitated, then said, "As you may or may not know, I am—was—a friend of Carol Winters."

Shayne nodded, studying his visitor. He judged the up-and-down promoter to be in his early thirties, which would make him roughly the same age as the accused. Also small—which would make him roughly the same height. He was a handsome little man with dark eyes of an intensity the detective had seldom before met—yet with lines of good humor at the corners of his mouth. His dark brown hair was impeccably styled, his tweed jacket of first rate material and cut.

He said, "I hate to think of her in this mess. I hope you can find who put her into it."

Shayne said, "As long as it wasn't you, don't you mean?"

"It *wasn't*!" Warren sounded shocked. "I wasn't even here when Joshua Winters was

murdered."

"Not that you wouldn't have liked to?" Shayne suggested.

"I won't say it didn't occur to me." This with a rueful smile. "But I'm just not the killer type. Besides, Winters did a lot for Carol. She was never really secure in her life before he married her. A nice guy, too, damn it."

"How close were you and the defendant?"

Warren spread his hands and wrinkled his low forehead. "Oh, we were for real, for about six months. She was *something*. But when Joshua got into the picture, that was it. One of the things about Carol is her honesty. I never knew her to tell a lie all the time we were—close. I *know* she didn't murder him."

"Do you know who did?"

"I wish I knew—I mean that. Why anyone would want to hurt a woman like that beats me."

"Maybe nobody tried to hurt her," the detective suggested. "Maybe somebody wanted to get rid of him for another purpose."

"That's what I keep telling myself." A headshake and, again, the rueful grin. "The only thing I had against him was that Carol fell for him."

Mike Shayne noted that Warren had not suggested that the late Joshua Winters took



her away from him. He considered this and said, "I was told you were having business problems."

"They're more or less chronic—or will be until I nail a really solid promotion."

"What sort of promotion do you do, Warren?"

Again the grin—this time non-rueful. Then, "Anything with a buck in it—county fairs, supermarket openings, even smalltime rock concerts—you name it. Don't worry, Shayne, I won't be small time forever."

"I don't think you will." The detective stood up. "Thanks for coming in, Warren—and good luck. But keep thinking about

Carol and the murder. If you can come up with any real leads, we could use them."

"Don't think I won't try," said Warren, whose head barely reached the redhead's Adam's apple. "Don't think I *haven't* tried."

"If you should come up with anything"—Shayne spoke as he piloted Warren into the reception room—"Lucy always knows where I can be reached."

X

STARING AFTER HIS VISITOR, the detective scratched his red thatch, then said to Lucy, "What did you think of him?"

Lucy tapped her lower lip with the tip of her ballpoint, said, "He seems like a nice little man. Carol Winters's ex-boyfriend?"

Mike Shayne nodded, then said, "See if you can arrange an appointment with Letty Hyndman for me, angel—preferably when her husband is not around."

"Do I scent an intrigue?" Lucy asked with one eyebrow aloft.

"You never can tell, hon-eybunch. You haven't met Letty."

Letty Hyndman received the detective in the penthouse suite sitting room where he had interviewed her the day before.

She was wearing heavier makeup than on the earlier occasion—Shayne judged to cover up any ravages of grief over Pat Barnes's murder. Otherwise, she looked like the same Letty—Mrs. Five-by-Five, to paraphrase the old song—short, solid, forthright.

She held the sewing basket in her broad lap and was embroidering a new pair of slippers. In a large ashtray on the table at one elbow glittered a small fortune in small jewels. Gesturing toward it, she remarked, "In a way, I'm not so sorry about losing the other pair. There was no more room to embroider them—unless I sewed stones on the soles."

"They weren't insured?" the detective asked.

She shook her grey head. "No way," she replied. "Even if Cyril would permit it, no company would issue a policy on those slippers."

"You inquired?"

"You're damn well right I inquired." Her New Orleans accent deepened with emphasis. She put her embroidery on the table alongside the gem-filled ashtray, faced Shayne firmly. "I may be Cyril's wife all these years, but I am not his slave. He had a big thing about insurance—an ego thing. Fire and accident insurance on our home, car insurance—of course.

But he thinks nobody is going to rob *him*."

A pause then, "He thinks nobody'd dare."

"And nobody did," the redhead interjected softly, "until a couple of days ago."

"Nobody *did*," she agreed. Shayne, did you come here to discuss my lost slippers?"

"Not entirely, Mrs. Hyndman. I also came to ask you a couple of questions about Pat Barnes and your relationship with him."

"My relationship?" The small pale eyes went wide. "You flatter me, Mr. Shayne." The trace of humor faded, turned to grim grief. "Pat may have been Cyril's secretary, but he was my cousin Patrick, once removed. Cousin Bessie's boy. We were very close. Having him with us was like a breath of fresh air from home. He felt the same about being with me.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hyndman. Do you have any idea what he was doing at the Danforth house last night when he was killed?"

She nodded, said, "Yes, I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I think"—she regarded him shrewdly—"I'll let you tell me. That's how much I think of your well known detective capabilities, Mr. Shayne." A pause, then, "Well, Mr. Shayne?"

Mike Shayne stood up, smiling and shaking his head. He said, "I'm not quite ready to do that, Mrs. Hyndman. So I bid you good day—and please accept my sympathies."

"Thank you deeply, Mr. Shayne." The interview was at an end.

Mike Shayne went back to the office. At five-thirty, he put down the phone and summoned Lucy from her bastion in the reception room. "Angel," he said, "where were we supposed to be having our dinner date tonight?"

Her charming face delivered distress signals. She said, "Michael, don't tell me you're not going to—"

He softened, said, "How would you like to dine at the Maison Argent over in Miami Beach?"

"Oh, Michael!" She bent over his desk to give him an affectionate kiss. "That wonderful new place everybody's talking about?"

"That's right."

Her face fell as she looked down at herself. "But, Michael, I haven't a thing to wear. I can't go like this."

"You've got all the time in the world. I'm not picking you up till ten o'clock."

"If you're taking me, Michael, at least change that shirt. And wear a tie." She hugged him

briefly, warmly, then was on her way.

Shayne locked the office door and dug into the file drawer to come up with a half-empty bottle of Martell, a glass and then ice from the miniature freezer under the water cooler. It had been a long dry day—unlike the day before without incident of violence. He pondered this fact as he downed a two ounce shot of cognac.

Perhaps, he thought, his would-be assassin's lack of success during the first two tries, plus a close escape on the second, had caused him (or them) to decide on another course. Perhaps, the murder of Pat Barnes had in some way removed Mike Shayne from their most-wanted list. Or, perhaps, Barnes had been his would-be assassin.

The redhead was inclined to doubt this—for one thing, the deceased's position as Cyril Hyndman's secretary presumably would have kept him too professionally involved to gad about on attempts to hit the redhead. For another, Barnes was simply not the type.

As he finished his drink, the telephone rang in the outer office. Shayne switched it through to his own instrument, picked it up, said, "Hello, Mike Shayne speaking."

"Mr. Shayne, this is Jack

Warren. I think I'm onto something."

"Good—what's the lead?"

"Can't tell you now, Mr. Shayne—only that it's something that happened in New Orleans around the time Joshua Winters was killed—or rather something that didn't happen. I'm sorry, there just isn't time now. Besides, I haven't been able to check it out yet."

Shayne said, "Call me when you're—" He stopped as he found himself talking to an empty dial tone.

Warren had sounded excited. The redhead crossed his fingers mentally as he put away the drinking gear and reached for his hat. He hoped the evening would bring more action than the day just past.

None the less, he walked out with his right hand close to the butt of his holstered .45, studied the parking lot in back of the old office building carefully before stepping outside to get into the Buick and drive home.

Nothing happened

XI

THE MAISON ARGENT was an adjunct of Miami Beach's newest de luxe caravanserai. Decor, food, service, entertainment—all were low-keyed, luxurious, top-top quality, with prices on

the same ultra-high altitude.

As they settled in a soft beige leather banquette, Lucy said, "Michael, I suppose it's foolish to look a gift horse in the teeth, but what brought this on? I'm not conceited enough to believe for a moment we're here because of my girlish charm."

Shayne leaned across the table to touch her wrist gently. He said, his grey eyes soft on her dark ones, "Don't underrate yourself, Lucy—you stack up with any other women in this room, and take that any way you wish, Angel."

She dimpled with delight, gave his hand a soft squeeze. Then the waiter was there, and they ordered their drink—a champagne cocktail for her, the usual Martell and water for him.

When the waiter was gone, she said, "Why, Michael?"

He nodded toward a table on the opposite side of the long oval room, said, "It just happens that I learned today that someone I want a look at is dining here this evening. So, since we have a dinner date, I decided to combine business with pleasure."

She followed his gaze, wrinkled her brow, said, "They look all right to me."

"They may be. But Lee Danforth is a hard man to see—always on the move, it seems."

The redhead did not tell her that he had seen a message scribbled on a dated note pad alongside the telephone just inside the Danforth front door that morning—a message that read, *Maison Argent tonight, 10 o'clock*.

It was now half past the hour and the Danforth party was comfortably settled. There were four in their banquette—Alice Danforth, Ben Winters, a blonde and a man Shayne judged to be Lee Danforth. For a moment, the detective wondered at their being out on the town the night after the finding of the body in the Danforth home, then he thought, *Why not?* After all, they were not related to Pat Barnes and the Danforth household had undoubtedly been disrupted by the police investigation that followed.

At first study, the insurance underwriter looked disarmingly amiable. He loomed large at table, thick of chest and shoulder beneath a well tailored dinner jacket. His face was handsome in an eagle-beaked fashion, his eyes light against his deeply tanned skin. His hair was dark, well brushed, receding from his temples.

Shayne turned his regard to Ben Winters, the tall, sandy-haired young man who had all but caught him in the Danforth

house the night before. This, he thought, was a cool one. He barely smiled at some sally the blonde made, while Danforth flashed brilliant white teeth in a laugh. To all appearances, the party looked like a pleasant affair.

What the hell? he thought. *It has to be one of them—perhaps all of them.*

The trouble was, they didn't look like conspirators—or killers. The redhead had long since learned the hard way that a murderer may look like anyone. But still . . . he couldn't help wondering.

The drinks arrived and they sipped, enjoying the lush atmosphere and the liquid rhythms of a soft and subtle *bossa nova* band at the far end of the oval room. People got up to dance.

Lucy said, "Let's Michael."

"No way." He shook his head. "You know I'm all left feet on a dance floor."

She signed, but desisted. Another waiter arrived with the handwritten menu and they ordered dinner—chicken *Ma-rengo* for Lucy, beef *Wellington* for Shayne. As the attendant left, he grumbled, "Why they have to gussy up good steak with *pâté de fois gras* and puff paste beats me."

"Why order it then?" This was an old story to Lucy.

"Because it's the only game in town," he replied.

The Brazilian music halted and the room went dark and silent gave for the inevitable clattering fork. A single spotlight came on suddenly, revealed a glittering auburn haired lady clad in glittering silver lamé from breasts to ankles that clung to her superb figure as tightly as a snake's skin.

To muted accompaniment of guitar and drums, she sang Cole Porter songs in a mellow voice that developed a sharp cutting edge as the lyrics demanded. Like everything else about the *Maison Argent*, she was double A-One in quality. She drew gasps and laughter at will from her audience, holding them rapt and happy for the half hour she appeared.

"How'd you like her, Michael?" Lucy asked.

"Dumb question," he replied. "She's great."

Their food arrived and Shayne was engaged in removing the puff paste from his beef *Wellington* to get at the steak beneath when a waiter captain appeared at the table carrying a telephone.

He said, "Mr. Michael Shayne?" And, at the redhead's nod, "There's a call for you, sir."

With a sigh, Shayne picked



up the instrument when it was connected. "Shayne here," he said, wondering who had managed to track him here, and how. He was not long in finding out as Len Sturgis' rumble came on the line.

"Mike," the Miami Chief of Detectives said, "are you coming in or do I pull you in?"

"For Christ's sake!" said the detective. "Let me finish dinner."

"Now, Mike," was the reply.

"Is it okay if I drop Lucy off on the way?"

"Don't take all night."

Shayne was about to ask Sturgis what it was all about when the dial tone hummed in his ear. He did not get opportunity to ask the question until he once more stood in the big

Captain's office across the bay. Then the answer was not exactly informative.

"You know damn well why you're here, you so-and-so."

There was no mistaking the genuineness of his anger. It took some little time for the police captain to let it all out.

"I won't insult you by asking if you know about the murder in the Danforth house last night," Sturgis began, "especially since you were there."

"I was?" the redhead asked innocently. His host seemed to swell with anger until Shayne thought he might burst.

"You know damn well you were there last night—so do we. You had to be there close to the time of the killing."

"How do you know that,

Len?" Shayne countered. "Can you prove it?"

"Do you think I'd have you come in if we couldn't?" Sturgis replied, leaving Mike Shayne in the anxious seat. Then, finally, "You left fingerprints on the side of the dining room entrance—plus more at the back door. "Sturgis took a breath, then added, "So how come you didn't call us about it, Shayne? How come you had us running down your prints all day instead of letting us know?"

Fingerprints! Mike Shayne thought. *Fingerprints!*

Although his outer attitude lingered somewhere between aggression and unconcern, he could not blame Sturgis for being angry. So he leveled as best he could—but it was a most unpleasant half hour. He was glad to get out of the Chief of Detectives' office intact.

When he returned to his apartment hotel, Stayne stopped at the main floor desk to ask the night clerk if there were any messages for him. The clerk, a grey haired, balding man with gold-rimmed glasses, nodded and handed him some slips of paper.

"This gentleman called three times. He sounded urgent. Said he'd wait for you at the Silver Parakeet."

The calls were from Jack

Warren. Mike Shayne went back down to the basement garage and got the Buick out again. He knew the Silver Parakeet from driving past it although he had never been inside. It lay about a mile south of where he lived.

While not exactly a dump, the restaurant-saloon offered a sharp contrast to the Maison Argent. The decor, instead of teakwood and beige leather, offered golden oak and worn red leatherette. Where the Maison was muted, the Parakeet was raucous—except for Jack Warren. He sat huddled in the rear corner of the rear booth with a bullet hole just left of the center of his chest.

He was stone cold dead.

This time, the detective reported the homicide and stood by until the police arrived—and afterward. He was intensely curious about the little man's murder.

No one, it appeared, had heard the sound of the shot. In a place as full of raucous blare as the Parakeet, this did not necessarily mean a silenced weapon had been used. The amplified crash of juke box rock could easily have muffled the shot.

The deceased had entered the booth about two hours earlier (which coincided with the first of his calls to Shayne's apart-

ment house). He had ordered a total of three Tom Collinses in that time and there was a watery bottom third in the glass before his body. Apart from the waiter who served him, no one had seen anyone enter the booth.

The Parakeet was not a regular hangout of Jack Warren, although he was known there as an occasional customer for some two or three years. In his pockets, there were only the usual—cigaretts, lighter, wallet, small change, keys, a handkerchief.

Yes, the bistro had been crowded all evening. Anyone might have slipped into the booth, shot Warren and walked away unnoticed. Shayne's brows were knotted as he drove home ninety minutes after reporting the body. Apart from possible ballistics test results, the killer had left no clue.

Mike Shayne tugged at his left earlobe as he park again in the basement garage of his apartment hotel. Perhaps the killer had left no clue, but what about the victim? For a long moment, the redhead sat silent in the dim-light, recalling what Warren had said in his earlier clue about the lead he thought he might have.

"... it's something that happened in New Orleans around the time Joshua Winters was

killed—or rather something that didn't happen."

Evidently it had checked out, and so had Jack Warren. But what in hell did it mean? After going up to bed, the redhead lay awake another ninety minutes before giving up on it for the time being.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE WAS ROUTED from slumber by the ringing of his telephone. His client was on the line. The famed attorney for once sounded disturbed. He said, "Can you get over here, Mike? I want to talk to you. Incidentally, I just learned of Jack Warren's murder."

"I can give you the flap right now," said the detective.

"That's not what I want to talk to you about," Hyndman told him.

"I'll be there within the hour," Shayne promised, stifling a yawn.

He made it in slightly under that time, having shaved, showered, dressed, left a message for Lucy with the answering service that he'd been in later, and tried in vain to locate Tim Rourke.

Although impeccably attired as always, the giant lawyer had circles under his eyes that suggested he had slept little if at all. After pouring Shayne

coffee from a Silex, he said, "I'm beginning to wish I'd never heard of you. If these last two murders are a result of your activity, you're upsetting a strategy developed over a lifetime."

The redhead ran a thumbnail along the line of his jaw, said, "I take it this means you believe Carol Winters is innocent."

Hyndman shrugged, said, "What else can I believe? Unless the prosecution decides to drop charges—which is unlikely at this moment—how the devil am I going to keep them off balance when we go to trial?"

"Find the real murderer," Shayne said.

"Exactly." Hyndman regarded the redhead quizzically. "And just how do we do that?"

Shayne took a sip of coffee, put down his cup and told his client everything he knew to date about the case.

When he was finished, the attorney said, "Very well, so what's your next move?"

"I'm going to try to run down what Jack Warren was doing in New Orleans at the time Winters was murdered. May I use your phone?"

"Of course. And if there's anything I can do to help . . ." He paused, added, "Letty's from New Orleans, you know. She keeps in touch. And she's very

cut up about poor Pat's murder."

"I'd still like to know what he was doing at the Danforth house." The redhead spoke without looking up as he dialed Tim Rourke's number. This time, he got the lanky reporter.

"Tim," he said when the reporter stopped growsing at being waked up so early, "I want to know what was going on in New Orleans at the time of Joshua Winters' murder. You have some news contacts there."

"So do you," Rourke replied.

"I'll work mine, you work yours," said Shayne. "Maybe, between them, we'll come up with something. Have them check, if possible, on what Jack Warren was doing there."

"How come you didn't tip me about *his* murder?" The reporter sounded aggrieved. "Don't you have anything?"

"That's two questions," the detective replied. "The answer to the second is, not yet. The answer to the first is also a two worder—Len Sturgis."

Rourke uttered an expletive, then said, "Okay, I'll try. But I can't promise anything."

"Thanks." Shayne hung up. He glanced at his wristwatch, saw that it was past ten o'clock—nine by New Orleans time—and dialed long distance.

P. A. (for Patrick Aloysius) Quinn was, in Shayne's estima-

tion, the ablest private investigator in the Crescent City. He and the Miami redhead had given each other a hand many times in the past. Luckily, he caught Quinn in his office and was able to relay the information he sought.

Quinn whistled, said, "Jesus, Shayne, you don't want much."

"You can do it," Shayne insisted, "if anyone can. And it's damned important, Pat."

"Okay, Mike, I'll get back to you. What's the deadline?"

The day before yesterday," the redhead informed him.

Letty wandered in, looking to the detective like some sort of large melon in a green house coat. She was wearing her new slippers, one of which was sparsely embroidered with precious stones, and carrying her large sewing bag.

"Mornin', Mr. Shayne," she said. "Any progress?"

"On your missing slippers?" he asked.

"Never mind them," she said. "On Pat's murder. The funeral's next Wednesday, in New Orleans. I hope you get his killer before he is laid to rest."

There was no mistaking the earnestness of her tone. Her eyes, deep set in their rims of firm fat, all but glared at him.

"I'm trying," was the best the detective could muster. In her way, he thought, Letty

Hyndman could be as forbidding as her husband.

Cyril Hyndman, who had risen with all-fashioned Southern formality when his wife entered the room, glanced at his magnificent wristwatch, then said, "You'll have to excuse us, my dear. I have an interview with my client in half an hour."

For an instant, as the fat lady looked at her husband, Shayne thought her eyes were actually going to shoot venom at him. But her voice was soft as she said. "I'm sure you're very busy, Cyril. Perhaps Mr. Shayne will go with you. I've heard he enjoys seeing pretty women."

"Come along, Shayne." The tall attorney, somehow looking smaller under the impact of his wife's covert putdown, led the way to the hotel elevators.

When they were descending in the cage, the detective said, "There are a few things I'd like to ask her, if you don't mind."

"Why not?" Hyndman countered. Then, shaking his head, "Sometimes Letty can be infuriating. I hope you weren't embarrassed by her jealousy."

The redhead shrugged it off.

XIII

WHEN THEY WERE again seated with the defendant in a County Jail interview room, Mike

Shayne said, "I hate to ask you to go over this again, but I'd like to hear from you exactly how you learned of your husband's murder and what happened after that."

Carol Winters bit her lower lip, seemed to gather herself together. "Of course," she replied. "If you think it will help!!

"It might."

"Very well." She told it simply. She had been awakened by a near-hysterical Ella (the maid), who had gone to Winters' bedroom with his morning coffee at the usual hour and discovered the murder.

"We slept in different bedrooms," she admitted with a blush. "Not for the reasons the prosecution seems to want to believe, but because Josh snored. I offered to use earplugs, but he didn't wish to inconvenience me in any way. He was the most considerate man I ever knew. If he hadn't been so, if we had slept together, perhaps he would be alive today."

She bit her lips again.

Shayne spoke drily. "Or perhaps there might have been two corpses instead of one. What did you do then, Mrs. Winters?"

She said, "I calmed Ella as much as I could, then I called the police."

"And then . . .?" he asked her.

"Then I called Alice Danforth. She was alone then, too, and she came over right away. If it hadn't been for her . . . Carol Winters paused, obviously close to tears.

Mike Shayne said, "Alone? You mean her husband had left for his office that early?"

She shook her head, said, "No—both Lee and Ben were out of town."

"Oh . . .?"

"yes, there was some kind of big insurance convention in New Orleans that week. They went together."

Shayne and Cyril Hyndman exchanged a long, pregnant look. Then the detective said gently, "Do you remember where they were staying?"

"The Lake Charles Motor Hotel," she replied. "Of course, they flew back here directly—at least Ben did. Lee had to make a speech or something, so he came in the next day."

Outside, in Shayne's Buick, the lawyer knitted his brows and said, "I don't see how their being in New Orleans means a thing. In fact, it gives them both an alibi."

Shayne nodded, then said, "But I don't believe it for a moment. Do you?"

"Right now," said Hyndman, "I don't know what to believe."

The detective drove him

downtown to a professional men's club where he had guest privileges. It was evident he had no wish to brave his wife's anger at the moment.

After dropping his client, Shayne drove to the office. Lucy, who had treated the redhead frostily over their interrupted dinner date the night before, was all contrition. She said, "That poor little man. He seemed so nice."

"Any messages?" he asked.

"Nothing urgent," she replied, "except that Len Sturgis wants you to call him. He didn't sound hot."

"Let him wait then—no, I want to talk to him."

Lucy put the call through and Shayne said, "Have you anything you can tell me about Jack Warren?"

"Nothing good," Sturgis replied. "He was in New Orleans the night Winters was shot."

"I know—he told me," said Shayne. "What about the Parakeet last night?"

"Nothing so far. There was too damned much crowd and confusion. Nobody noticed if he had visitors before you came in and found him there dead."

The detective thanked him and hung up. There were, he thought, too many corpses, too many dead ends literally as well as figuratively. He waited impatiently for calls from



Rourke or Pat Quinn. It was nearly closing time before the New Orleans detective called back.

Quinn said, "I've run down about everything I can, Mike. Here it is for what it's worth."

"Let me put Lucy on the other phone, to take notes."

"Okay." And, when Lucy had her shorthand pad ready in the outer office. "All three were at the Lake Charles Motel on the night in question. Ben Winters and Lee Danforth were guests of an insurance conventions. Warren was there pushing for a Miami insurance firm peddling a new costs-and-damages system."

"Any record of their meeting?" Shayne asked.

"The brothers-in-law—sure. They shared a suite. If they had any contact with Warren, it didn't make waves."

"So far, zonk," said the redhead.

"Afraid so—but here's one odd item for what it's worth. Ben Winters was slated to make an address the afternoon in question. He didn't make it, Lee Danforth delivered it for him."

"Where the hell was he?"

"Apparently, he got a call about five A.M. and took the first plane for Miami."

"That's it?" Shayne asked.
"No record of the call itself?"

"Hell, the Lake Charles doesn't monitor its guests phone calls. Sorry, but that's it."

"You got the time of the plane he took out?"

"It took off at seven-eighteen, on time, nonstop to Miami."

"Time of arrival?"
"Nine-o-two," said Quinn.
"On time. Fair weather all the way."

"Thanks again, Pat."
"My pleasure. You'll get my bill the first of the month."

Shayne hung up and put his head in his hands. He felt certain that the event which had not happened in New Orleans near the time of Joshua Winters' murder had to be the non-delivery of Ben Winters' address before the convention. But Lee Danforth had gone on the platform for him. What in hell did that signify?

The detective was still pondering the possibilities when

Lucy announced that Tim Rourke was on the line. The reporter sounded even more lugubrious than usual.

"I couldn't even place your guys in New Orleans," he reported. "Hell, if they were rock celebrities or TV stars or pro-athletes, maybe. But there these were just guys named Joe—or rather Ben and Lee and Jack. I'm sorry, Mike."

"When can you get away from the city room, Tim?"

"Now, I guess—why?"
"Tim, one more favor. Can you get me a couple of half-decent pics of Joshua Winters?"

"I suppose so."
"Bring them to The Beef House as quick as you can. I'll be waiting there for you."

"As long as you're buying."
"Freeloader!" said the redhead.

"Why not?" Rourke replied.
It was close to an hour later when he shambled into the restaurant and slid into the rear booth across from the detective. He laid a brown manila envelope on the table between them and motioned for Shayne to open it.

Shayne pulled out the glossy prints. There were four of them, two of Winters in death, two taken before his demise. The redhead laid the ten-by-twelves on the table in a row and studied them carefully, one

after another, then repeated the process. Rourke said nothing until his friend looked up.

Then he said, "Hey, chief, can I order a drink now?"

"Tim," Shayne told him, "You can order a hundred if you want."

The order given, the reporter rested forearms in front on him and said, "Mike, would you mind telling me what in the name of bleeding hell this is all about?"

"Later," the redhead told him. "I've got to prove it out first."

XIV

BEN WINTERS RECEIVED Mike Shayne at the Danforth house. As the detective entered, his host said, "When you called and asked to talk to me, I took the liberty of sending everyone else away."

"Did you tell anyone I was coming?" Shayne asked.

"Not to my knowledge, Shayne. This is hardly the sort of interview I want overheard."

He led the way to the living room, motioned the detective to one of a pair of twin sofas. The room itself was attractive, even luxurious, furnished mostly with cane-backed chairs and French Provincial tables and secretary.

Close-up consideration of Ben

winters confirmed the redhead's earlier impression that here was a cool looking customer, a youngish man under rigid self-control. He wore pinstriped grey flannels and a soft blue roll-collar shirt. His footwear was quietly expensive, his manner coolly courteous.

"Drink?" he suggested.

"Why not?"

Shayne noted that Winters measured the redhead's Martell on the rocks, and his own Scotch and soda meticulously with a small jigger glass. As he reached forward to pick up his glass, the detective felt a measure of reassurance afforded by the heavy automatic pistol clipped to his belt beneath his rumpled tweed jacket.

Ben Winters sat down and said, "What exactly is it you wished to see me about?"

"Winters, I know who murdered your father."

His host's cool blue eyes met Shayne's grey ones without a blink. The moment stretched out as the seconds ticked noiselessly by.

Then Winters said, "You have proof?"

"All I need. The police will dig up what *they* need once they know what I know."

"May I see what you have?"

Shayne produced the manila envelop Tim Rourke had given him, took out the photographs

of Joshua Winters and laid them on the table for his host to examine them.

Winters eyebrows rose as he looked at them. Then he said, "These are pictures of my father. What sort of proof do they contain."

"Winters," said Shayne, "last night I was at the Maison Argent while your family dined there."

"I saw you leave with an attractive young woman."

"My secretary." The redhead decided it was time to stop sparring. He said, "While I was there, I got my first good look at your brother-in-law, Lee Danforth."

A faint smile lifted the corners of Ben Winters thin lips. He said, "The resemblance? A family joke."

"Rather a grim one, I'm afraid. Winters, I do not know the exact sequence of events that led to your father's murder, but I know what happened. Your own movements that day confirm me. You received a call in the early morning at the Lake Charles Motel and caught the first plane for Miami. Lee Danforth delivered your speech at the convention that afternoon."

"So . . . ?" The faint smile had vanished from Winters' lips.

"So you came here in an effort to straighten out the mess.

But it only got worse. You were quite willing to sacrifice Carol Winters and anyone else who might suspect the truth."

"I had nothing against Carol. It never occurred to me a girl that beautiful and attractive could be convicted. It was I who insisted Cyril Hyndman be retained for her defense."

"Probably true," said Mike Shayne. "But what about the other two murders—those of Barnes and Warren? And what about the two attempts on my life?"

"I regret them, believe me," Ben Winters said, sounding quite sincere. "I only hope you get out of here alive."

The voice came from behind and to the left of Shayne, from behind a half-open French window that led to a flagged terrace beyond.

It said, "I'm afraid that is no longer possible, brother, dear."

Alice Danforth stood there, holding a long barreled pistol equipped with a silencer. Its little black muzzle-eye was pointed directly at Mike Shayne's chest. She stood no more than ten feet away—a distance at which, with such a weapon, it was all but impossible to miss a target as large as the detective.

She said, "We can't let him go to the police, Ben."

"How do you know I haven't

already told them?" Shayne countered.

"Because if you had, they'd be here. You're quite right of course. Which is your misfortune."

Ben Winters said, "Alice, you can't just go on killing everyone who gets in your way."

"This should do it, Ben," she replied. "It should also get that sweet bitch Carol off the hook. Too many murders after she's safely in jail. Which ought to make you very happy, brother, dear."

The venom with which Alice pronounced the phrase "sweet little bitch" brought the redhead up short. Its bitterness, along with that of "brother dear", smacked of the psychotic.

"Very slowly," she said to the detective, "you will remove the weapon from the holster under your belt and toss it—gently mind you—behind the sofa."

"Alice." Ben Winters anguished made his voice shake.

"Shut up," she said, not looking away from Shayne. "The gun. Or do I shoot you where you sit?"

Moving very carefully, Mike Shayne cleared the Colt from its holster, then held it by the barrel keeping it high enough to be well in view of the murderer.

High enough for something else as well . . .



Instead of lobbing it over the sofa, he scaled it directly at Alice Danforth. As he did so, he rolled from the sofa and around it, crouching low and gathering himself for a spring. He heard a gasp, then the sound of a silenced pistol being discharged and the swift whine of a bullet behind and above him.

Only then did he hear the thud which told him his own gun had not missed his target. Twisting and moving wide to the left, he launched himself in a long flying tackle at the mur-

derer, demolishing a small table in the way as though it were matchwood.

The silenced pistol coughed again and the redhead did not even hear the bullet. At that instant, his shoulder crashed into Alice Danforth, sweeping her off her feet and sending both of them against the far wall. Although the detective outweighed her by at least eighty pounds, the maniacal fury with which she fought him put him fully to the test of his strength.

He was bleeding from a badly scratched face when he at last got clear enough to land a hard right downchop against the angle of her jaw, toppling her face down on the carpet. He went into a crouch again as he saw Ben Winters picking up a pistol in either hand, but relaxed as the murderer's brother gravely offered them to him, butt first.

"Don't worry," Shayne assured the fair-haired young man. "No jury is going to convict her. She won't even be tried."

"I'm only sorry, Mr. Shayne, that we let it get so far out of hand. But you can't help hoping against hope when it someone you love and . . ." He made a gesture to indicate the inadequacy of words to express his feelings.

XV

THAT EVENING, LATE, with his face well bandaided, Mike Shayne dined with the Hyndmans in the privacy of their penthouse suite. Since Carol would not be released until the morning, the atmosphere between husband and wife was almost friendly.

"Shayne"—the attorney peered at him across the table under his heavy white brows—"what put you onto Alice Danforth anyway? I confess I never thought of her as even a suspect."

"Mr. Hyndman," said the detective, "you weren't thinking in terms of suspects other than Carol Winters. By your own admission, you took it for granted she was guilty. I went into it with an open mind."

"I still don't see how you got onto her," said Hyndman.

"It was mostly a matter of elimination," Shayne told them. "It almost had to be one of the family—and, once I got the information on the whereabouts of Ben Winters and Danforth in New Orleans, I knew neither of them could have killed Joshua Winters."

At first, I could make no logic out of events. So I was forced to consider illogic—and that led me to the paranoid-psychotic pattern. Even for that I needed

a motive. I remember at dinner last night, thinking that Lee Danforth reminded me of somebody—but I couldn't remember who. I went to sleep trying to dig out the association of memories."

"You pulled it out of your subconscious?" Hyndman asked.

"Not exactly—but I woke up half-remembering a newsprint picture of Joshua Winters I must have seen just after his murder. It kept nagging at me, so I had Tim Rourke bring me some prints of the old man."

A pause to consume a mouthful of blood rare steak, then, "The minute I looked at them, I was sure. His resemblance to Lee Danforth was striking."

"Oedipus complex." The attorney nodded.

"It was the only way it made sense. If Alice had a father-fixation, her friendliness toward Carol became utterly false. Evidently, she could not bear the thought of her father having sexual relations with a beautiful young woman like Carol. He had betrayed her beyond endurance."

So she killed her father instead of Carol," said Hyndman.

"Right. The psychiatrists have a lot of words for it. And when I was hired, she was frightened into attempting to kill me, or at least scare me off," said Mike Shayne. "We'll

probably never know which for sure."

"But why kill Pat?" Letty asked.

"Evidently, either he guessed what had happened or she gave herself away. He, too, seems to have reacted to her apparent friendliness. In any event . . ."

He shrugged.

"Then Jack Warren started nosing around. He worked the New Orleans angle as I did. But Warren still wasn't sure, and he made a bad mistake. According to Ben Winters, Warren called her and said he had to see her. My guess is, he couldn't quite picture Alice as a murderer and wanted to make sure.

"The way the police figure it as of now—and I go along with them on it—Alice set up the date at the Parakeet which is close enough to both the bay and the Causeway so that she was able to get over there from the Maison Argent and back, probably while the club was blacked out during the girl's singing act. Sturgis already has witnesses—a busboy, a garage attendant, probably more—who saw her leave or return."

"You mean," Hyndman asked, "she sneaked out while you were sitting across the club?"

Mike Shayne shook his head. "That would have been too

early. She had to do it during the second show to be sure Warren was waiting for her at the Parakeet—he must have tried to reach me to be there, too, but I was out, worse luck. I might have saved his life."

"What happened happened," said the attorney. "But let's get back to Pat's murder."

Letty looked up from the food she had been silently devouring and fixed her eyes on Shayne. He met her regard coolly, then turned his attention back to the big attorney.

"Until and unless Alice talks, I'm afraid that must remain supposition," the detective said. "The connection between your secretary and the Danforths has not yet been established. My guess Hyndman, is that your client, asked Pat to see Alice on some small personal errand."

They let it hang there while they finished the meal and summoned the room service waiter to wheel the cart out of the Hyndman suite. Cyril excused himself and went into another room on the plea of having some telephone calls to make in connection with wrapping up the case.

Letty Hyndman, who had resumed her slipper embroidery, again looked at Shayne and said, "Are you ready to discuss the robbery now?"

"I can do better than that—if

you'll answer a couple of questions."

"You mean . . . ?" Eagerness made her look almost girlish, gave the detective a fleeting impression of what she must have been when she was young.

He nodded, saw rather than heard her murmur, "Thank God!"

"Mrs. Hyndman—"

"Call me Letty," she interrupted. "Everybody does—everybody always has."

"Okay, Letty, just how did Pat become so closely involved with Alice Danforth?"

Nodding toward the door through which her husband had vanished, she said, "What are you goin' to tell him?"

"Nothing."

"Very well." She signed. "It all seems as childish after what has happened." She laid down her embroidery, added, "You can't know what it's been like all these years, playin' Alice-sit-by-the-fire while Cyril gallivants around, tryin' all these murder cases and havin' himself a ball with every buttercup he can lay his hands on. Maybe our romantic life is dead, but I still love the old goat. I came along to Miami this time to put a spoke in his wheel."

"With Pat's help?" he asked.

She nodded, said, "When we decided on the plan to steal Cyril's bankroll, we thought it

would look better if I got robbed, too. But then we heard Cyril planning to put you on the case, and we got scared."

"Then you leaked the story to the *Herald*."

She nodded. "I have a cousin who's married to one of the editors. He ran the story as a special favor to me."

The detective shook his red head. "It was no favor to me," he said. "Or maybe it was."

"We didn't dare tell him Cyril only wanted you to recover the stolen goods, so Pat said you were working on the Winters case. Then we had to hide the stuff somewhere. Pat got Alice to take them and keep them."

"Then you decided to return them secretly and Pat went there to get them?"

She nodded. "He didn't tell me he suspected Alice—she seemed so friendly—and I don't think he did."

"It's possible she didn't want to give them back," Shayne suggested. "Seventy-five grand is a lot of loot."

"Either way"—Letty spoke barely above a whisper—"I sent that poor boy to his death."

"You had no reason to suppose Alice Danforth was crazy." The detective tried to comfort her. "Here."

From his pocket, he pulled a

small pouch, rose, handed it to her. "Alice removed the stones from the slippers, Letty. I hope they're all there."

"Thank you, Mr. Shayne, but it doesn't really matter now."

"One more thing." This as she moved to rise and leave the room. "What good did you think leaking the story would do?"

"We were just tryin' to drive Cyril out of his mind," she said. She left then, paused in the doorway to turn and ask, "How did you get them back?"

"Ben Winters gave them to me. He didn't want the police to have anything more on his sister. He took them when he found her with Pat's body. She'd called him and he wanted to get her out of the house before he came back and phoned the police."

"What a devoted brother! What a wonderful man!" She signed again, looked at the redhead, added, "I just hope Cyril learned a lesson out of it. And you won't tell him?"

"Of course not."

She had barely left when the attorney came back. He said, "Carol gets out of prison tomorrow morning. So . . . no trial." He looked old, tired, almost beaten, added, "I think I'll take a long rest, Shayne."

Maybe, the detective thought, Letty's ploy had worked after all. He pulled the bankroll out

of a pants pocket, handed it to the attorney, said, "Letty's got her jewels back, too."

The attorney hefted the thick pod of greenbacks, looked at Shayne, said, "How much of this do I owe you?"

"You want to do it this way?"

"Why not? How about ten big ones?"

"Fifteen," said Shayne

"Why, you bastard!" Briefly, Hyndman looked as if he were enjoying himself. "I'll give you ten-five."

They settle for twelve and a half, recorded the deal on a sheet of hotel notepaper, after which the attorney escorted the redhead to the elevator.

"I'll let you buy me a drink

downstairs," he told Mike Shayne.

The elevator doors slid back and an exceedingly beautiful women stepped out, regarded the attorney with a glint of recognition, then smiled and moved toward the far end of the corridor.

"On second thought," the attorney added, "I'll have to give the drink a miss. I'm just too damn tired."

As he got into the lift, the redhead thought Hyndman didn't *look* tired. He looked like a man just back from a rejuvenation trip to a Swiss sanitarium.

Poor Letty, was the phrase that ran silently through his head.

MIKE SHAYNE—Presents

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**PRIVATE ALBERT WAS DEAD—IT
WAS UP TO COLONEL GRANT TO
STOP A NATIONAL SCANDAL..**

**DAY
OF
JUDGMENT**

**by
EDWARD
D.
HOCH**

his world. Occasionally he would stroll across the parade ground outside his office, inspecting the greenness of the closely cropped grass, and at other times he would merely brood about the medical report that kept him chained to a desk far from the action.

Some days were worse than others, but this day was not so bad. After lunch he had sent his secretary to the basement machine for Cokes and stripped off his uniform jacket. It was warm, even with the air conditioning, and there was much to be done. Before him were re-

COLONEL MATTHEW TABLE GRANT was a big man, with a wide stomach and broad beefy shoulders no longer able to fit into the medium tanks still plentiful at Fort Cline. He had a desk in an air conditioned office at Headquarters, with a padded chair and an attractive WAC secretary, and that had become

ports from Washington to be read and evaluated, orders to be processed, a thousand things to be accomplished while the general was away.

He looked up from his desk only once during the afternoon, when the firing began from the direction of the range. The warm wind was just right to carry the sound, and the suddenness of it sent a flight of sleepy pigeons winging skyward in a widening spiral. It would be hot on the range today, he thought. Hot with the sweat of bodies and the odor of gunpowder.

Thirty minutes later the phone at his elbow gave a familiar deep buzz. His secretary was again away from her desk and he answered it himself. "Colonel Grant here."

"Millhouse out on Range Five, sir. There's been some trouble."

"Trouble?"

"You'd better come out right away, sir."

"What kind of trouble?" The thought of riding out to the range in this heat was unpleasant in the extreme.

"Captain Haypen, sir. He's had one of the men shot. Executed."

"What? Are you all down with the heat out there?"

"No sir. It's true."

"Executed?"

"The man's *dead*, sir," Millhouse shouted into the phone. "Dead! Haypen had him *shot*!"

Matthew Table Grant sighed into the phone. Had everyone in the world suddenly gone crazy? "Stay there, Millhouse. I'll be right out."

He left the office, not bothering to say where he was going. There were always a staff car and driver at his disposal, and the man snapped to attention as he approached. "Sergeant—Range Five. On the double."

"Yes sir!"

Across the parade ground there came the gentle hum of a siren just rising in its fury. That would be an ambulance pulling out of the post hospital. He could see a Military Police car starting up, too. Here and there a wandering, off-duty soldier looked up to follow the activity with a questioning frown.

When he reached it, Range Five was a labyrinth of confusion. Men walked and gestured and yelled and milled about aimlessly, all pretense of military discipline vanished. One of the Military Policemen shouted, "*Attention!*" At the command, some order began to form itself out of the mob.

Captain Millhouse, the range officer, was leaning against the steps of his wooden lookout tower, mopping the sweat from his brow. "God, Colonel, I'm

glad to see you. It's one hell of a mess."

"Tell me everything that happened, Captain."

Millhouse led him over to a little group of ambulance men and MPs who clustered around a shape on the sandy ground. Grant bent and lifted the corner of a brown blanket, staring hard at the dead man beneath.

He straightened up to hear Millhouse saying,

"I wasn't here when it happened, Colonel, I'd gone down the road to Range Six. Captain Haypen's men weren't firing, and I had no reason to expect trouble."

"Go on."

"On my way back I heard a volley of shots—not more than three or four. As soon as I rounded the trees I saw him. He was stretched out on the ground, bleeding, and the men—about a dozen of them—were in a line with their rifles, like a firing squad. One of them was sobbing and screaming and another boy had fainted."

"What did Captain Haypen say?"

"That Private Albert, the dead boy, had disobeyed orders: He said Albert tried to start a mutiny and had to be executed."

"Oh, my God!" Matthew

Grant breathed. He could already see the headlines.

One of the ambulance men asked, "What do we do with the body, sir? Take it to the base hospital?"

Grant nodded absently, wishing to hell the general wasn't away. He turned to Millhouse. "Have Captain Haypen taken into custody and brought to my office," he said brusquely and turned back to walk toward his car.

"Don't you want to talk to him here, sir?"

"It's too damn hot to talk to anyone here."

WHILE HE WAITED for them back at his office, Grant had time to reflect on the turn of events that had forced this thing upon him. He had given the army and Fort Cline the best years of his life—thirty-two of them in all—and the place now seemed more like home to him than Cleveland or Detroit ever had.

Then, when he was a boy, there had been only the eternal wanderings with a sickly mother and a scheming father. They had lived their lives one jump ahead of the bill collectors, somehow surviving the depression years until he grew old enough to join the army just before the outbreak of World War II. The army offered security from many things, and

even a man without a wife was not looked on oddly.

But with the years his body had grown flabby, his health uncertain. The tanks that had carried him to victories in Europe and Korea found little use in the jungles of southeast Asia. But the general knew how Grant loved Fort Cline, how he had watched it grow over the years from a desert hell-hole to a lush oasis that was one of the country's leading training centers.

Grant had been part of Cline long before the general came, long before the row of trees had been planted along the parade ground. Even if Grant was unfit for active duty, the general had no reservations about making him second in command at Cline.

Now, as he watched the afternoon sun reflecting off the bronze plaque honoring the Indian-fighters of the original Fort Cline, Colonel Grant wondered what would happen to it all. The trial, the publicity, the racking of the army he loved—he had seen it happen too often of late, and he didn't want it to happen at Cline.

"They're here with Captain Haypen, sir."

"Send him in."

"Alone, sir?"

He looked at the WAC whose name he could never remember.

"No, bring your pad and make a transcript of the conversation. Have the MPs wait outside."

"Yes, Colonel."

He didn't look up when Haypen entered the room and saluted. Instead he shuffled through some papers on his desk and tried to act as if nothing unusual had happened. When he finally raised his eyes he saw the tall, dark-haired officer standing stiffly before his desk, circles of dried perspiration staining the armpits of his uniform. Haypen was not yet forty, a good officer but nothing exceptional.

Matthew Grant looked at him and cleared his throat. "Captain, you'll have a great many questions to answer later in the day, but I'd like to get your version of this thing first. What happened out there?"

Captain Haypen glanced at the WAC with her pad and pencil. "Is this an official statement, sir?"

"No, no. I have have to know what happened."

"He tried to start a mutiny among the men. It was his life or mine."

Grant felt his temper rising. Was this man insane? "Captain Haypen, do you realize what you've done?"

"Yes, sir. There was no other way."

"Do you mean you're trying

to justify your act? That you set yourself up as judge, jury and executioner?"

"The men were getting out of hand, sir. It was so damn hot out there! Some firm action had to be taken."

The utter calmness of the man was beginning to infuriate Grant. "Getting out of hand! Man, you weren't in battle—you out on Range Five! The range officer was right down the road! The MPs were only five minutes away. How could the men get out of hand?"

Captain Haypen shifted his weight. "Well sir, we were using two ranges—Five and Six. My lieutenant is in the hospital and I was supervising the firing myself. The first group had finished and started back by truck. There were only about twenty of us left, waiting for the truck to come back. When it didn't come, I gave the order to start marching.

"Of course there was some grumbling because of the heat, but it wasn't an unusual order. Suddenly this Private Albert shouted something about going to the Inspector General. We'd had trouble with him before, and I ordered Sergeant Simmons to pull him out of line and bring him to me.

"He seemed to go crazy—he struck Simmons on the head with his rifle, knocking him

down. Then he urged the men to get me, too. I think he realized right away he was in big trouble, and the only way out was a general mutiny."

Grant closed his eyes. "What were his exact words, Captain?"

"He used several obscenities, sir. I thought he was really getting them stirred up. I raised my carbine and covered the lot of them."

"Why didn't you leave it at that and call for assistance?"

"He just laughed at me, sir. He laughed at me and cursed some more. I told him if he continued to incite the men it would mean a firing squad for him. When he kept it up, I ordered two men to take his rifle and I told the others to form a line."

"Where was Sergeant Simmons during all of this?"

"Still unconscious on the ground. It was up to me, and I knew I had to act decisively. I formed them into a line and gave the command—*ready, aim, fire*. They thought I was joking, all of them. Not one even bothered to raise his rifle. And Albert just stood there laughing at me.

"I couldn't back out and let them see that little swine get the better of me. I ordered them to fire again and brought up my own carbine to show that I wasn't fooling. I told them any-

one who didn't fire would join Albert.

"This time, when I gave the command, four or five of them fired their rifles. A couple of them shot into the air, but two bullets hit him. As soon as I realized he was dead, I was sorry I'd done it that way, sir, but it was too late for regrets."

Grant looked the man up and down. "Do you realize we'll have a half-dozen Congressional committees on our necks by morning?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

Grant sighed. "That's all, Captain. You'll be under house arrest, of course, pending court-martial."

"Yes sir."

He left the room and the WAC followed him out. Grant sat for a moment with his hand over his eyes, trying to believe it was all a dream, some terrible nightmare that had crept up on him as he slept. After a time the phone at his elbow rang, and he picked it up gingerly. "Colonel Grant here."

It was his secretary. "Colonel, I've got the Associated Press on the line. They'd like a statement."

Already? How had the news leaked out this fast? "Switch them to the post information officer. I have no statement."

But as soon as he hung up, the phone buzzed again. "Col-

onel, this is Ray O'Hara. I just heard."

Major Ray O'Hara, the post provost marshal. "Terrible, isn't it, Ray? The man must have been mad with the heat."

"What do we do? Any suggestions?"

"I'd like to lock him up and throw the key away and pretend it never happened."

"Seriously, Matt . . ."

"I am serious, damn it! AP's already got the news, and all hell's going to break loose any minute now. Why did it have to happen with the general away?"

"Have you talked to Haypen?"

"He just left my office. Crazy as a loon. You can't convince him he's guilty of anything worse than bad judgment."

"The court-martial will sell a lot of papers."

"I know." Matthew Grant sighed. "As if the army didn't have enough troubles these days!"

"I'm questioning the men in Haypen's company. Maybe you should come over, Matt."

Grant sighed again. "All right. Give me five minutes."

He lifted his bulk from the chair and went out into the afternoon sun. Halfway across the parade ground, a young officer came running up to him. "Colonel Grant . . ."

It was the post information officer, a man named Withers whom Grant thoroughly disliked. "What is it, Withers?"

"Reporters at the gate, Colonel. They want a statement."

"Do you have one to give them?"

"No, sir. I thought *you* might have one."

"I can't do your work for you. I have enough trouble right now. Think of something to tell them. How in hell did they find out so quick?"

"I think one of the civilian employees phoned them, sir."

Grant glanced at his watch. "Hold them off for an hour—longer, if you can. Tell them I'll have a statement by seven o'clock."

He left the man standing in the middle of the parade ground and hurried on to Major O'Hara's office. The slim, sun-tanned provost marshall was waiting for him. "Good to see you, Matt."

"Who've you got in there?" Grant asked, motioning toward the door to the inner office.

"Sergeant Simmons and two men who admit firing the fatal shots. Come on."

He led the way to the inner office, where Simmons was telling his story to another officer. Grant knew Simmons slightly and respected him as an old army man. "Hello, Sergeant."

"Hello, Colonel. Hell of a mess."

"What happened?"

"Well, the captain wanted us to march in when the truck didn't come back right away. You know it was hot and everybody was tired, and this Albert started shooting off his mouth. The captain told me to go after him, and he slugged me with his rifle. Crazy damn fool! After that I was out cold!"

Major O'Hara nodded. "Would you send one of the men in next, Sergeant?"

Simmons was replaced in the chair by a tall nervous youth who couldn't have been more than twenty. He looked at the three officers in the room and his lower lip began to tremble slightly.

"What's your name, son?" Grant asked.

"Private Banjack, sir."

"Tell us what happened this afternoon on the range."

The young man's voice droned on, telling the same story—the truck that didn't return, the heat, the order to march back, Albert's revolt, the slugging of Sergeant Simmons, all the rest.

"None of us would fire at first. We thought he was joking, to scare Albert. But then he pointed his carbine and ordered us to fire. Still only a few of us did. I shot into the air,

but a couple of the bullets hit Albert. He was laughing all the time till the bullets hit."

Grant passed a hand over his eyes. He moved to the window and stared out at the mess hall, where lines were already forming for the evening meal. Men stood talking in little groups, occasionally glancing toward the provost marshall's office. Grant wondered if the general had heard the news yet.

O'Hara came over to him. "Shal I bring in the next one?"

"If you want," Grant said. "I'm going. You can handle this end yourself."

"I have four military policemen guarding Haypen's quarters in the BOQ."

Grant nodded. "I'll be in my office if you need me. I have to prepare a statement of some sort for the press."

"It's all on your shoulders, Matt."

"Don't I *know* it! Suddenly I'm responsible for Haypen—a man I hardly know."

"I think it was the heat that got to him."

"I'm only sorry they didn't kill each other out there," Grant said. "At least, if Haypen were dead too, the thing would be quickly forgotten. The way it is now, the court-martial will drag it out for months."

Already it was nearly six, and the reporters would be

gathering in another hour. Matthew Grant left the provost marshall's office and headed back across the parade ground toward headquarters. The thing was a mess, there was no doubt about that. The general would be most unhappy. Even the President would be most unhappy. Grant paused and glanced toward the Bachelor Officers' Quarters. Perhaps he would speak to Haypen again, one more time, before meeting with the press.

THE MP ON THE DOOR saluted as he entered, and Matthew Grant passed quickly down the hall to Captain Haypen's room. The quarters were large and modern—almost as good as Grant's own—and Haypen seemed pleased to see him. The captain's eyes were tired, but otherwise he showed no signs of strain.

"Nice place you have here," Grant said.

"Thank you, Colonel."

"I want to talk some more about this afternoon."

Haypen nodded. "Certainly sir. I realize the difficulty of attempting to justify my action to the public."

Grant pulled up a chair and sat down. "Look here, Captain—in any statement we issue to the press, we certainly cannot attempt to justify your

act. No matter what that boy did out on the range today, including the assault on Sergeant Simmons and the talk of mutiny, it was entirely beyond your authority to pass judgment on him and have him shot."

Haypen leaned forward. "You think it never happened in combat? You think an officer never had to shoot an enlisted man for disobeying orders in a combat situation? The public may never hear about it, but it happens nevertheless."

"Range Five was not a combat situation, Captain. I hate to use the word, but the press will call you a murderer."

"Yes." Haypen sighed. "I suppose they will."

"Is there anything more you can tell me? Any further justification for your action?"

"A court-martial would have given Albert twenty years at hard labor for what he did, Colonel. The men were restless with the heat and the entire situation might have exploded at any moment. Certainly I took the law into my own hands, but it was that or have a wholesale revolt on my hands."

Grant frowned at his hands. "I agree the situation was serious, though I think you overstate the case a bit. Nevertheless, private justice of this kind can

never be condoned. You were one man out there this afternoon, and you had no right to rule on the life or death of Private Albert. As the thing stands, you'll have every mother in America against you. It could have been their sons out there today."

"Must we depend on mothers to win our wars, Colonel?"

"The army has suffered enough, Captain Haypen. I won't have it suffer through another trial. It could mean the death penalty for you. I suppose you know that."

"I'll be ready for the judgment of the court."

"Death or disgrace—to yourself and the uniform you wear."

"It's too late now," Haypen said.

"Perhaps not." Matthew Grant wet his lips. "If there wasn't any court-martial, if the whole thing just ended here and now, today . . ."

Haypen looked up blankly.

Grant cleared his throat and got slowly to his feet. He walked to the tiny window that looked out on the base. Men were strolling back from the mess hall, still in groups, still talking.

"They left you your sidearms, didn't they?" he asked very quietly.

There was a sharp intake of

breath behind him, but he didn't turn. "Yes," the voice answered finally. "I wasn't wearing it on the range."

Matthew Grant turned then. "Captain, as the acting post commander, if I told you the verdict in your case was *guilty*, you'd accept that, wouldn't you?"

Their eyes met for a brief instant only. "Yes."

"And if I told you the sentence was *death*?"

Captain Haypen bowed his head.

Grant cleared his throat again. "I have to go now, to make a statement to the press." He held out his hand to Haypen, and the Captain shook it.

Back in his office, Matthew Table Grant stood behind the familiar oak desk and faced a score of openly unfriendly faces opposite him. It was his first real experience with the press on other than ceremonial occasions, and he didn't like it. There were pads and pencils and tape recorders, even a camera to capture his statement for television. He didn't like it at all.

"I have a statement about the unfortunate events of this afternoon," he began, glancing down at the hastily typed sheet on the desk before him. He paused as his secretary sig-

naled from the doorway. "Excuse me—I have a call."

The telephone crackled in his ear. "Matt, this is Ray O'Hara. I'm at Haypen's quarters. He just shot himself."

"Oh?"

"Not five minutes after you left him, the MP said. Right through the head. They never even searched his room for a gun."

"I'll be over shortly," Grant said. He hung up and lifted his eyes to the waiting press.

"Gentlemen, I have a brief statement to read you concerning the tragic events of the past few hours. Captain Bruce Haypen took his own life a few minutes ago, following the illegal execution of an enlisted man this afternoon."

Later, much later, Grant left headquarters building by a side door and walked across the parking lot to the mess hall. It had been a busy day and he suddenly realized he was hungry. He comforted himself with the thought that he had somehow made the best of a bad situation. The general himself could hardly have done better.

He looked up at the night sky and saw that the stars were coming out. A cooling western breeze was blowing across the parade ground, dissipating the heat of the day. It was a good night to be alive.

HE WHO WAITS



When he saw Claudine again the old desire, long, long dormant, came back in full force—the desire to kill!

by VIRGINIA HART

SHE STOOD IN the express line at the checkout counter with her loaded shopping cart, or Paul would never have noticed her. He'd stopped long ago focussing on single faces in the haze of billigerent faces around him. But the checker, nerves frazzled by rush-hour marketers demanding ten cents off on outdated coupons or wanting fifty dollar bills changed in return for the purchase of a pack of cigarettes, exploded in a shrill voice that commanded everyone's attention.

"Six items or less in this line, girlie. Cantcha read the sign?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Sure. Those six-inch-high letters with the lights flashing on and off are hard to see, aren't they?" the checker snapped.

"I'm sorry," the girl repeated, her voice sounding thin and embarrassed. She stepped out of the line and quietly pushed her cart into place at a regular checkout counter.

"These housewives watch soap operas all day, then rush to the supermarket at five o'clock to get in the way of men who have to work for a living," a blob of a man next to Paul observed to no one in particular. "Oughta be a rule against it."

She was wearing a red scarf, pulled forward so that Paul could see only an inch of profile from where he stood. But the thudding inside his temples assured him there could be no mistake. It was Claudine. After all these fruitless years of searching, he'd found her—ironically, only blocks from his own apartment.

He sucked in huge gulps of air, afraid he might lose consciousness from the sudden shock. He'd had several fainting spells in the last years and he couldn't afford to pass out here and let her escape. He abandoned his shopping cart and pushed through the line.

He had begun to think the years had stilled his passion to a murmur. He had fewer and fewer daydreams lately about what he would do to Claudine when he found her—and those

he had were far less elaborate. But now as he passed, only feet from her, it was all he could do to keep from lunging at her, from grabbing her slender neck between his hands and—but no, he had waited this long. He could wait a little longer.

Outside, he pretended interest in the lurid headlines in the racks of girly-newspapers lined up outside the door, but he caught the slow smile Claudine gave the box boy—the smile she always reserved for men. His fists clenched. What was the boy? Sixteen, seventeen? They were never too young to escape her attempts to captivate them.

Over the years he had imagined misfortunes of all kinds falling on her—illness, accident, poverty—stealing away the beauty that had been her weapon. How had she managed to stay so lovely, so untouched physically, at least, by all the ugliness she had brought to those unfortunate enough to have loved her? His hand moved instinctively to his left side, where, for a moment, the old bullet wound was fresh again, and he winced at the remembered pain.

The doors swung open to allow her exit, and he braced himself for the confrontation, but her eyes brushed his—unseeing.

It was incredible. She had destroyed his life and now she didn't even recognize him!

He had been able to think of nothing but Claudine since the moment they met. First, there were the suffocating, indescribable moments of joy when they had loved together. But no less powerful had been the other kind of joy he'd felt as she moved about the apartment, dusting, humming to herself. She had been sensual in her seeming innocence, as if unaware of what her movements aroused inside of him.

There had been pain, yes, when he told his wife, Marta, that he was leaving her. It had wrenches his heart to bring her hurt she didn't deserve. He had felt hollow inside the day he took Marta and their little daughter, Veronica, to the airport. He still remembered the wide wet eyes and the thin, cold hands clutching his, just before they got on the plane to go and live with her parents.

"Are you certain you want this, Paul?" Marta asked.

Oh, he had been sure. His love for Claudine far surpassed any other emotion he had ever known, except for the one he felt now—hate.

He let Claudine pass by, wanting to wait til she got well away from the market entrance before he followed. Hopefully,

she'd be on foot. Her mother and father had been killed in a flaming car crash when she was thirteen. The memory had left her with a terror of being behind the wheel of a car. He had tried to joke, to bully her out of her foolish fear to no avail—and now that fear would be on his side.

He dropped a coin into one of the slots and withdrew a newspaper in case someone was watching. Then he turned slowly in time to see Claudine standing at the curb, waiting her chance to cross the street.

It amused him to see her in this wretched neighborhood. In the old days she could think of nothing but money and the luxuries it would buy. It was at her persuasion he had joined Meggs and Winkler in their ill-planned robbery attempt.

"I'll die," she had wailed, "if I have to live in this dump all my life. What's the good of being pretty if you never know the feel of diamonds on your skin or fur across your cheek? It's not fair!"

When he got out of prison, he was devastated to find she had moved from their old apartment and was living with another man. But when he thought it out, he realized how hard it must have been for her while he was away. She was so soft and helpless. He'd go after her,

forgive her, and take her home.

The years had dimmed the details or maybe his fury had never allowed him fully to register what happened. He remembered Claudine laughing at him, he remembered slapping her. He remembered her girlishly handsome, soft-muscled lover start toward him and had relished the chance to show his physical superiority over Claudine's chosen replacement. She'd be disgusted and go home with Paul where she belonged.

But there had been no fighting. The tiny gun appeared suddenly and its bullets tore first into his leg and then into his side. He had awakened in a hospital to the news that the bullet had caused an infection and that his leg would have to be amputated above the knee.

Even then, he had supposed Claudine would come forward and tearfully throw herself on his mercy. She'd tell him how sorry she was and that she'd spend the rest of her life making it up to him. But no. He had never seen her again . . . until now.

He kept a good distance between them, but not so much that he wouldn't be able to catch up when his moment came. With a loaded shopping bag on each arm, she wouldn't be able to walk too fast. Joy

surged through him when she turned down Sylvan Street. It was as if she were obeying the force of his will.

It was dark and in the center of the block was the old Trinity church with its unlit parking lot that backed off into an alley. It would be perfect. No—perfect would be trapping her in his room, where he could relish her terror—talk to her and let her think about what was going to happen. But this would have to do.

His thoughts spurred him on and just before he caught up with her she stopped as if she were listening—aware that someone was following. But his hand clamped across her mouth, muffling her before she could cry out.

The bag of groceries fell and a bottle of wine inside, smashed loudly to the pavement. Paul cursed, ready to flee if someone had heard and came out to help her. No one had. No one did.

She was so tiny that her struggles were useless. He dragged her easily down the steps that led to the church basement. He was grateful for the dimly lit bulb over the door. She had to recognize him first and know why, or it would all be for nothing.

"Still love me, sweet Claudine?" he cooed, dragging out the words. "I can see you

are glad to see me, my precious one."

Her beautiful eyes widened in horror and she struggled harder, straining against his hand in an effort to scream. Then his hands clutched her throat and it was over—too quickly.

PAUL AWAKENED the next morning with a terrible headache. He had been to the market the night before and had somehow forgotten the bottle of aspirin and the half and half he had made the trip to buy. Curious.

He walked down Sylvan Street, pausing to join the crowd of people gathered at the back of the Trinity church. "What happened?" he asked a gray-faced woman with stiff dyed-red hair.

"A girl's been murdered. Down there," she said, pointing a bony finger.

"Some little boys found her," another woman added.

"Terrible," the first woman said.

"Move along," one of the

policemen barked. "Let us do our job."

"They say she's only about twenty-two or three. That makes the third in the last four months."

"Terrible!" Paul mumbled.

"Move along, Grandpa," the policeman said, his hand brushing Paul's shoulder. "Haven't you anything better to do?"

Paul turned to leave when he saw her. He might never have noticed if the policeman hadn't singled her out. "Go on, lady. You don't want to see this."

She wore her hair short and she had on dark glasses, but the thumping in this temples told Paul there could be no mistake. It was Claudine.

Strange after all these years of searching and hoping and finally giving up, he had found her. Ironically, only a block from his own apartment.

He'd wait for darkness, of course, but he'd follow her now to see where she lived. Then he'd watch and await his moment. That was the secret. He had waited this long. He could wait a little longer.

Complete in the Next Issue:

THE MURDER MAKER

A New Mike Shayne Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

OR WAS SHE PUSHED?

The van Aukens were San Francisco class with a capital C. The problem was—which of her heirs was planning to do rich old Amelia van Auken in. It was Train's job to spot the killer in time.

by ERNEST SAVAGE

THE OLD LADY, Miss Amelia van Auken, had told me over the phone that one of her three cousins was planning to kill her. Now she was telling me again, in person, emphatically and at length.

"Which one?" I asked, shoving the question in edgewise. It seemed to surprise her. Her claw-like hands made spidery fists and she nearly snarled at me.

"That's for you to find out, Mr. Train!" Spittle sprayed the remnants of her breakfast.

Sergeant Bill Brady had warned me she was a tiger. She'd called the Police yesterday afternoon and complained about this alleged murderous cousin. Out of protocol—she was, after all, a van Auken—they had sent a man out and he had been chewed up pretty good. Then Bill suggested she call me and she had, an hour

ago at 8:30 a.m. She was no way to start your day.

"Well," she snapped, "what are you going to do about it?"

We were in her bedroom on the third floor on the van Auken mansion. She was seated in a straight-back chair beside her bed and covered from chin to ankles by a heavy quilted robe. A breakfast tray bridged her lap. Within easy ranch of her left hand was a chromium-plated walking-frame and next to it a self-propelling wheel chair.

Against the wall facing her bed was a 25-inch console TV. A remote control unit was on her bedside table, along with a transistor radio, an 8-switch inter-com box and a telephone. The far end of the room was a solid wall of bookshelves and in front of it a chess table was set up for play.

From where I stood I could



look through French doors leading to a balcony and see the upper third of the south tower of the Golden Gate Bridge. The rest of it was buried in fog. It was a room to satisfy most human needs, but she wasn't confined to it. I had come up from the ground floor vestibule in an elevator with the controls set low enough to operate from chair level.

"I'll need help," I said finally. "What evidence do you have?"

She grimaced. "Nothing that would satisfy your simple male mentality, Mr. Train. Intuition—an old woman's intuition. I'm certain of it."

It wasn't senile dementia. Her bright blue eyes had been fastened on mine since I'd entered the room and they were clear and sharp. Probably every bad-tempered rich old woman has a feeling somebody wants to kill her, and that's no sign of irrationality.

"Why," I said, "does he—or she—want to kill you?"

She writhed in a spasm of pain and clutched one gnarled hand with the other. The arthritis in her fingers looked cruel. "Leota will tell you," she muttered.

"Is Leota the woman who let me in?"

"Yes."

"Is she one of the cousins?"

"Yes."

"But she is not suspect, I take it?"

"She is—equally with the others."

"And *she* will tell me why *she* might be preparing to kill you? Come, Miss van Auken."

"She will give you the facts. Facts are all a good detective should need. You're dismissed, Mr. Train."

"Should I arrange for my fee with her?"

"Yes. Please go."

Miss Leota van Auken was in the library on the ground floor watching the Hollywood Squares on NBC-TV. She seemed enchanted by it and made me sit there quietly while a contestant won 2,000 and a new car in ten minutes.

"Fascinating game, isn't it?" she said when it was over. "I'd give anything to play the Squares, Mr. Train, wouldn't you? I mean have a whole afternoon with it all by myself. It's so grossly American—vulgar, exciting dishing out wealth."

"Maybe one day," I said, "the whole thing will fall down right before your eyes." I was getting a little impatient with the van Auken women. "Your cousin upstairs wants me to ask you some questions. Specifically, are you planning to kill her and, if so, how and why?"

She laughed. She looked

about my age—in the forties somewhere—but better preserved, in the way of women. "That policeman yesterday sort of asked me the same thing, but not quite so bluntly."

"Did you answer him?"

"Yes. I told him I wasn't—not that the thought hasn't crossed my mind."

"Who are the other cousins?"

"My brother Sterling, and my cousin, Ralph Hampton. Ralph's mother was a sister to Amelia's father and my father was his brother. Get it?"

"Yes. Where are they?"

"They both keep rooms here in the house, but don't often use them. Ralph teaches at a private school near Sausalito and has an apartment there. He spends weekends here when he's not on dormitory duty. Sterling"—she shrugged—"is here when he can't afford to be someplace else."

"What does he do?"

"His card says he's a financial consultant and he seems to have money now and again, but I would hardly call it regular work."

"And you?"

"I manage this house for Amelia. I keep the books, cook, see to maintenance, and act as her companion. See here, Mr. Train, you're not seriously proposing to investigate Amelia's fantasy, are you?"

"I am. Which brings up another matter. She told me to see you about my fee."

"What is your fee?"

"One-fifty a day, plus expenses."

"What? *Ridiculous!*" Indignation propelled her to her feet. "Why, that's outrageous!"

"The standard fee around town is two hundred a day, Miss van Auken."

"So?" She glared at me. "That's even *more* ridiculous—I simply won't discuss it. Name something reasonable."

"Is it your money?"

"No, but my cousin is not the Hollywood Squares, Mr. Train."

"How rich is she?"

The question seemed to change her mood, as though she enjoyed contemplating the answer. "She's amply provided for, but she herself owns nothing. She's the beneficiary of a life estate set up by her father, my uncle. In his wisdom, I might add."

"And when she dies?"

"The three of us inherit."

"How much?"

"Conservatively, over a million apiece." She smiled blandly her irritation soothed by more pleasant thoughts. She was a handsome well-built woman with a fine head of auburn hair. A bit too tall, maybe.

"Motive," I said.

"Don't be silly, Mr. Train.

She'll be seventy-nine next month. All we have to do is wait."

"That can get tiresome," I told her.

"It *has* gotten tiresome. I'd be delighted if she passed away tonight. And so would she, I think. But I certainly wouldn't risk a murder charge simply to speed her on her way."

"Would Sterling?"

"No. He's a pussycat."

"Ralph?"

"No. A mouse."

"Then what make her think she's in danger?"

"I have no idea," she said earnestly. "Truly I don't. Boredom perhaps. Wishful thinking."

"Meaning?"

"She's in severe pain and has been for years. Maybe she wants out."

"Suicide at one remove, huh?"

"Very possibly."

"How long have you been her—châtelaine?"

She smiled again. "A pretentious word, Mr. Train. I've been her maid-of-all-tasks for seventeen years. Long years."

"You don't like her?"

"I despise her! And she me."

"How much are you paid?"

"That's none of your business. But I earn every dime of it."

"Why don't you quit?"

"Because I like it here. I in-

tend to live here the rest of my life."

"Well," I said, "it's a beautiful place."

SHE GAVE ME a phone number for Sterling and a phone number and address for Ralph. She gave me the name and number of Amelia's doctor and the name of a trust officer at Bayshore National, trustees of the estate.

She had taken me to a small office off the kitchen, formerly the pantry. It was very tidy, as was she herself. She received a check each month from the trustees, she told me, varying in amount according to need. The terms of the trust were that Amelia was to receive a sufficient sum from the proceeds for her "maintenaince, benefit and well-being", a direction that could be flexibly interpreted, and was.

Years ago, if Amelia wanted to spend the season on the Côte d'Azur, the money was forthcoming, but if she wanted a new car, somebody came out from the bank to make sure the old one wouldn't do. But since her arthritis had advanced to its present state, very little of the estate's income was needed.

"I run the place on less than a thousand a month," Leota said with pride. "The bank pays the taxes and insurance on the



house, but I pay for everything else—utilities, the gardening service, food and so forth. It pleases me to run a tight ship."

"Why?"

Another question that pleased her. "I figure a dollar saved," she said, "is thirty-three cents earned."

"Perhaps," I said edgily, "I'd better send my bill to the trustees at the bank."

"It would do you no good. They'd send it to me for approval, and of course I'd reject it. Fifty dollars, it seems to me, would be ample."

"Plumbers," I said, "earn that much before their first coffee break."

"Then become a plumber, Mr. Train. It's a much more useful trade and, besides, you're rather built like one."

We were staring at each other coldly when the inter-com box on the desk suddenly blared forth. It was Amelia. "Where's my tea?" she

screamed. "I want my tea, dammit!"

Leota leaned forward and flipped the switch. "Hold your water," she growled. "I'm talking to this larcenous detective you've hired."

A little splotch of red had appeared on her temple just above the cheek-bone. It would have been interesting to take her blood-pressure reading just then, but she looked as though you couldn't have touched her with tongs.

I made a leisurely tour of the first floor of the lovely old house and then went outside. The place had more ground around it than is usual in San Francisco, enough to include a tennis court behind a screen of tall cypress. Red clay, the lines freshly limned, twenty feet of back-court space, the net slack, waiting. I gazed at it covetously.

If ever I'm rich, I'll have a court of my own, but I'll never

be rich. I beg my way onto courts like this, or I don't get on at all. Did Leota play? She had the body for it—lithe, easy moving, good legs. I began to fashion a deal—fifty bucks a day, plus a hundred dollars worth of court time. On my next visit, I'd bring a couple of rackets and can of balls.

I looked at the tall rear face of the building above the paved courtyard. Forty feet up, the French doors leading to Amelia's balcony were open. Behind the black iron filigree of the balcony rail, I saw movement—the old woman was watching me.

I smiled and waved, but got no answer. I felt a sudden compassion for her and waved again. She was old and unloved and in pain, a trinity of bad news. And perhaps mad, I thought, insane—for what do I know about it and what more would it take?

But no. I had read cunning and anger in those steely eyes, but not madness. Her weathered old face vanished and the doors behind the balcony rail closed slowly and I went on about my tour.

After lunch I drove out to Sausalito to call on Ralph Hampton. I didn't call him beforehand because I didn't want him to know I was coming. I found his school with no trou-

ble, and in the shabby administration building, a dour, middle-aged woman told me where I could find him. He was in his office, a tiny windowless room, the door open when I got there, the air carcinogenated with layers of blue pipe smoke that spilled out into the hall like smog.

I stood in the doorway and coughed. He glanced up, dog-eared the page of the book he was reading, took the pipe from his mouth, fingered his horn-rimmed glasses higher up the bridge of his boney nose and said, "You must be Sam Train. Leota told me you might be out this afternoon to ask me if I intend to kill Amelia."

Good old Leota! I said, "Do you?"

He uncoiled from his swivel chair—if a mouse, then the world's tallest at six four or five. "No, but I do hope one of the others does. The smoke bothers you, doesn't it?"

"A bit." I retreated into the hall and he shambled after me.

"I enjoy my pipe," he said. "And it has the additional virtue of cutting short most visits to my office."

"Any of your students died of lung cancer yet?"

He chuckled. "No. They have their own ways of doing themselves in, Mr. Train, and quite effectively, too."



"Why does Amelia think one of you intends to kill her?"

"You get right to the point, don't you?" He shrugged. "I agree with Leota that it might be a form of wishful thinking. I dislike Amelia, Mr. Train, and always have. She's led not only a useless life, but one singularly lacking in charm, a quality the rich are almost obliged to dispense, otherwise why have them? No, her most evident characteristic is spiteful arrogance, but now—"

"She's old and in pain."

"Exactly. And what's more, counting the receipts of a mispent life. She's not dumb, she knows the score and her every waking moment must be a kind of hell. I think she'd *like* one of us to kill her."

We walked outside into a small quadrangle and Hampton banged the dottle out of his pipe on the heel of his shoe. Through windows in the building opposite I could see the heads of students bent over their desks. "What will you do," I said, "with your million?"

He laughed. "Get away from

here. There's a place I know near Tunbridge Wells in England. I will go there and buy it and sit in it and read books for the rest of my life. I'm forty-nine, so the money should be adequate."

"For you and your wife?"

"I have no wife. It's my chiefest blessing—until, of course, Amelia's gone."

"I take it Amelia has no control over the distribution of the estate after her death. It goes to you three whether she likes it or not."

"Correct. And that's been a burr under her girdle all these years."

"Has she ever had a serious love affair?" The thought had crossed my mind.

"Not that I know of. You understand, she's thirty years older than I. But the terms of the trust would have a singularly frustrating effect on a prospective husband, I would imagine. It provides for her, but for no one else. Besides, of course, as a wife she would be unthinkable at any price."

He glanced at his watch. "I

proctor a class in five minutes, Mr. Train. It's been nice talking with you, but really, I think you're wasting your time. It would be insane for one of us to kill her—she's too near to dying all by herself. But on the other hand," he added reflectively, "she has been for a long time, hasn't she? You can get out through that ivy-covered arch over there—very *gemütlich*, don't you think?"

BACK IN MY APARTMENT, I dialled the number Leota had given me for Sterling and got an answering service. I asked the girl to have him call me when he could and added that it was a matter of life and death. She said, "Thank you, sir."

Then I called Amelia's doctor, Claude Harrison, and two and a half hours later, at 5:30, he called me back. I explained my mission and asked for a rundown on Amelia's health. He was tired and terse. "For a seventy-nine year old woman with advanced arthritis, arteriosclerosis and a mean mind, she's not badly off."

"Will she make eighty?"

"She could make ninety, Mr. Train, but if she died tonight it wouldn't surprise me."

"Do you think there's anything to her fear of being murdered?"

"Well, I'll say this—she's a

highly murderable woman. I have to recite the Hippocratic oath to myself every time I go over there."

"But—"

"But no. Why should they? She'll die soon enough. Among other things, she's a virgin and you know what Dorothy Parker said about them."

"Yeah, they hate every minute of it—death's the only release. Then ninety is not a good bet, right?"

"Right. Not for any of us."

"Are there any drugs around the place that Leota, for instance, might slip into her tea?"

"None that I've prescribed."

"What's your medical judgment of Leota?"

"A fine healthy woman, well-disciplined, well-controlled."

"Not a murderer."

"I didn't say that. But I will if you want me to."

"That's too subtle for me," I said. "How about Amelia's mental state?"

"Mean, as I said, but not mad."

"Then how come this fear of being killed?"

"I don't know, Mr. Train. I guess that's for you to figure out. Call me if you need me."

Sterling's call came about five minutes later. I'd formed a mental picture of him through the day—affable, loquacious,

outgoing—and it was right on target. He exuded convincing bonhomie over the phone and, a little later when we met—as he had quickly suggested—at a bar, I was greeted by a professional nice man. Not a bad way to end a day that had begun with his cousin Amelia. Leota, of course, had gotten to him first.

"It's ridiculous," he said. "It's a way of enhancing her importance, bolstering her ego, which God knows needs it. She's been developing this fantasy for the past several months."

"Oh?"

"Yes. You didn't know? We play chess together now and again, it's my contribution to her amusement. She told me a couple months ago, quite abruptly, that one of us was planning to kill her."

"Excluding you, I presume?" The drinks arrived at our table just then and we both welcomed them—this a double vodka martini, mine the standard scotch.

"Not necessarily. I'd beaten her two games out of three that night and I attributed it to her bad sportsmanship."

"Does she play a good game?"

"Better than I. She's got quite a good mind, Train. But the point is, of course, that none of us would be fool enough to kill her when her days are so

clearly numbered. I would have been much more tempted ten years ago, believe me. In fact, I was."

"What will you do with your million, Sterling?"

"Afford the life style to which I've become accustomed." He laughed. "I like that—afford the life style to which I've become accustomed. Precisely!"

"What do you do for a living?"

"Get people together. I'm a sort of catalyst. I know dozens of people with money and dozens of people who need it. I get them together."

"For a fee?"

"Or a piece of the action. Sometimes it works out well, sometimes not."

"It sounds precarious."

"It is. Right now—" He shrugged.

"What?"

"Well, dear Amelia's passing would be mighty propitious." He drained half his drink at a gulp.

"That's a rather candid admission, don't you think?"

He shrugged again and held up two fingers toward the bar. He had selected the place and they knew him here. He looked at home, comfortable. He smiled. "I'm a candid man, Train. Nothing to hide, no place to hide it."

He made it his business to be

likeable and he did it well. I could see the same fine bone structure in his face as in his sister's, but under more flesh—the same dark, long-lashed eyes, but more affable and humorous.

It seemed odd to me that none of the three cousins was married, or ever had been. They were all attractive people, but they'd been playing a waiting game and maybe life in all its fullness could start for them only when it ended for Amelia.

I sighed and finished my scotch just as its replacement arrived. All of them had the same first-rate motive for murder, but I could see none of them actually doing it. Particularly since Amelia had begun to publicize the possibility.

Ten years ago—as Sterling said—it would have been a more tempting venture, but they had all grown used to waiting, to rationalizing each ever-longer, ever-more-restless day to the inevitable end. It was a charade, I agreed, this advertised fear of being killed—but why? What was Amelia's point?

Well, she had one—the only one there could be—and it occurred to me as I sat there and watched Sterling light his third cigaret I smiled to myself. It was an old trick she had in mind, as old as the laws that

govern murder itself. But how, I wondered did she plan to bring it off? And would she have the guts?

I put the question aside for the moment and said, on another track, "Let me test this candor of yours, Sterling. Assuming one of you is going to kill your cousin, which would it be?"

"Leota." He laughed and repeated her name with affection. "Leota, beyond a doubt."

"Why?"

"Easy. She's the strongest of us by far. What's more, she's with Amelia almost all the time, and that's my definition of sheer hell. Besides, Leota loves that house, the van Auken house, she covets it. Long ago she made Hampton and me give up any future legal interest in it. She wants it all to herself—and the sooner the better."

"Well, I must say she takes good care of it."

"Oh?" He looked skeptical, then smiled. "Not really, Train. Everyone has that first impression—including detectives evidently—but she's deferred an awful lot of maintenance."

"Like what?"

"Well, the furnace hardly works at all any more and most of the bathrooms are pure Edwardian, and the balcony rails

are nearly rusted out and so forth, but she's putting all that off until it's hers and she can change things to suit herself. She's a very willful girl."

"I hope she won't mess with that tennis court," I said.

He laughed again. "She won't. It's her pride and joy, she loves the game."

"Who's she play with?"

"Anyone who's good enough, providing she like him, or her. Even detectives, I would suppose." He smiled his catalyst's smile.

We talked on a while longer, but I found that the most interesting thing he'd said all evening. In fact, he had said practically nothing, another trick of the catalyst's trade. But he hadn't had to; he wasn't really involved in the game. Except as a winner.

I DIDN'T CALL LEOTA the next morning to tell her I'd be out at nine, because I figured she'd be there, and she was. I had a tennis racket under my arm when she answered the doorbell.

"What's that for?" she said. She was in a housecoat.

"To hit tennis balls with," I said. "Usually over a net. Usually somebody hits them back. How about you?"

She looked at me as though I were a new species. "Is that



why you're here—to play tennis?"

"No—to solve your little problem. The tennis can come later. I have this deal in mind, you pay me fifty doll—"

"I don't have a little problem, Mr. Train. Amelia does."

"No, you do, Leota. You just don't know it yet."

"Well then, come in and solve it for me," she said non-committally and swung the door wide.

She led me into the library again, where the TV was airing

another game show, a big wheel spinning around with numbers on it and a lot of excited vocal accompaniment. I shut it off before either of us could get hooked and leaned my racket against the face of the set.

"Well, you're cheeky enough," she said. "What's my problem?"

"Where's your bedroom?" I asked.

Her brows lifted. "On the second floor, directly over your head. Why?"

"Can Amelia get to it if she wants?"

"She can get to any place in the house if she wants. Why?"

"Are you ever out of the house?"

"Of course I am. I do the shopping, I play tennis, of course I am."

"Are you missing anything?"

"Like what?"

"An earring most likely. A brooch, maybe, or a necklace. Something you wear around your neck or head."

Her brows lifted again. "I'm missing an earring, but how on earth did you know that?"

"I didn't *know* it, it was just the most logical thing. It would fit neatly in Amelia's clenched paw. Is the railing on her balcony rusted out?"

"Yes, almost. But—"

"How come?"

"Well, I intend to have them

all replaced with stone balusters when Amelia's gone. It's one of our points of difference. She's refused to authorize the change for years, and the bank agrees with her. Sterling told you didn't he?"

"Yes, but that's neither here nor there."

"What's this all about, Mr. Train?"

"Call me Sam and accept my challenge for a few sets of tennis and I'll tell you." I smiled seductively.

It didn't work. "Get to the point," she said stiffly.

"All right, Miss van Auken. The point is that your cousin doesn't want you to inherit any part of the estate."

She looked bewildered. "But she has no control over that! I inherit in any case."

"Except one," I said. "If you're found guilty of murdering her, you don't inherit. And I believe she is planning to commit suicide and make it look as though you did away with her."

"But how?"

"Let me ask you a couple more questions. Do you brush your hair? I mean, do you use a hairbrush?"

"Yes. It's on my vanity next to my jewel box."

"Okay. You mentioned you employ a gardener. Usually they come at a set time on the

same day every week. Does he?"

"Yes. Every Thursday afternoon at one-thirty. They're very precise. There are two of them. But—"

"Okay—this is how. She probably has some strands of your hair from the brush and she has your earring. She was going to clutch those things in her hand as thought in last minute desperation she had torn them from your head, then push herself through the rail of her balcony to the courtyard forty feet below.

"And she is going to do it just before the gardeners arrive, so they'll find her before you did. She's probably been timing their arrival for weeks now. In view of all this propaganda she's been laying down lately and your known hatred of her, it would make a pretty convincing picture. And tomorrow is Thursday." I shrugged.

Leota's mouth was agape. "Why the old *bitch*!" she said. "Why, the cunning old *bitch*! I'm going up there right now and—"

"No!" I caught her well-muscled arm. "Let *me* do it." I added with emphasis, "It's what you're paying me for."

THE OLD LADY DIDN'T give me much trouble and it didn't take long to do. When I knocked and

entered her room, she was finishing breakfast on a tray in bed. I said good morning and walked directly to the balcony doors, threw them open, stopped out and began jiggling the rail in my hand. It was loose enough to go over with the slightest push. She had probably been working on it for months, was probably working on it yesterday when I saw her from the court below.

Back inside, her eyes were on mine like the muzzles of a double-barrelled shot-gun. She was smart enough to know what I was about at once, a very shrewd old lady. I drew up a chair alongside her bed and sat down. She had had eggs and bacon and toast, a fairly hearty meal. "Where," I said, "is the earring?"

She was slowly masticating a piece of toast, her eyes trying to go off and shoot me dead. "I won't pay you for this," she snarled finally. "This isn't why I hired you."

"I know, Miss van Auken. I was part of the stage dressing, wasn't I? Like your call to the cops. Where's the earring?"

"She's a mean woman, she doesn't deserve a dime, not a dime!"

"That may be so, but what you had in mind was pretty mean, too. Assuming you had the courage to do it."

"Tomorrow I'm going to do it tomorrow!"

"No you're not. It's too late."

"You can't stop me"

"I won't try, but the point's lost now. You kill yourself and Leota will inherit like the others. Where's the earring?"

"He should have left the money to me. Why didn't he leave the money to me?" Her eyes had gone childlike, bemused. She had probably been asking herself that question ever since her father died. "Why didn't he leave it to me?"

"Maybe," I said, "he knew what he was doing. Where's the earring, Miss van Auken?"

"Oh, hell!" she said, her eyes fiery and mean again. She reached into the pocket of her robe, took out the earring and hurled it to the carpet. I bent over and retrieved it and, when I'd straightened up again, she had re-armed her eyes. "You won't get paid for this, you know," she growled. "Not a dime, not a dime!"

"So everybody keeps telling me," I said. "Goodbye, Miss van Auken; nice having known you." She looked mean enough to last another ten years.

"Damn you! *Damn* you!" I heard her say as I was closing the door and I felt that twinge of compassion for her again. It passed quickly.

Leota was waiting in the hall

outside. I handed her the earring, a bit of turquoise in an antique silver setting. She looked as it abstractedly. "Could she have gotten away with it, do you think?" Her wide, darkly glowing eyes questioned mine. I was trying to decide which of them I liked the least, or the most.

I shrugged. "Sixty-forty she could have. You had motive and opportunity, and she would have had a handful of pretty convincing evidence. Maybe seventy-thirty."

She made a face as we got into the elevator and creaked slowly down to the vestibule. I went to the library and retrieved my racket and she was still pondering the question when I returned, the earring still in her open hand.

"Waiting for someone to die is an awful way to live, isn't it?" she said. "I never realized that before. It's what I've been doing."

"It's nothing to make a career out of, Leota."

"Nobody should have to do it," she said quietly. "It's hateful—it's immoral."

I pulled the heavy front door open and paused long enough to say, "You'll get my bill in the mail," but she didn't react. She was looking at her hand, the fingers clenched tightly now over the earring.

I stopped by Central Station on Vallejo St. and told Bill Brady what had happened. He had asked me to keep him posted in case police involvement was indicated. He was amused. He doubted the old lady would have killed herself just to thwart her cousin, but he hadn't seen her eyes, didn't know the measure of her pain. I thought she would have.

He asked me how I liked being out in the civilian world, after 19 years on the force, and I told him it was just like the job had been, part good, part bad. He looked disappointed.

I own a cabin in the Sierras near the headwaters of the Big Red River. Like the van Auken house, it had a lot of deferred maintenance to deal with and I had a lot of time on my hands. At home before lunch that day, I made up my bill for Leota (I charged two full days for negotiating purposes, plus \$27.00 expenses) and mailed it on my way out of town.

I returned the following Tuesday afternoon, feeling pretty gloomy. I had done some work on the place and a little fruitless fishing, but it had rained four out of the five days I was there.

When I walked in my apartment, my hands full of mail from the box downstairs, the phone was ringing. It was Bill

Brady and he asked me a bit testily where in hell I'd been, that he'd been trying to get me every half hour since Saturday.

"Why?" I said.

"That client of yours, Amelia van Auken, was found dead in her bed Saturday morning, and under the circumstances I wondered if you'd care to comment."

"What killed her?"

"The death certificate listed the cause as congestive heart failure. It was signed Dr. Claude Harrison and he tells me he had no reason to doubt it, but it all seemed a little too quick and neat to me. I mean—"

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Who found her—cousin Leota?"

"Yeah, when she brought in the breakfast, or so she said. She phoned Dr. Harrison immediately and then, a little later, she had him call us."

"She had him call?"

"That's the way it went."

"And what did you do?"

"Nothing. I didn't take the call. In fact, I didn't know about it until after lunch, but Phil Mackie, who did take the call, just wrote it off. Harrison told him there was no reasonable doubt about the cause of death and Phil didn't want to start something he couldn't finish in five minutes. You know what the work load is."

She was buried yesterday morning. Sam."

"That quick, huh."

"Yeah, that's what I thought too. I laughed at all this last Wednesday when you told me, but now I've got this funny feeling about it."

"So have I," I said. "But outside of exhumation and autopsy, what can you do about it?"

"Nothing, and we can't exhume unless we've got clear evidence of foul play. That's why I've been trying to reach you. You got anything at all we could use, something you didn't tell me about?"

I thought about it for a minute, recalling the old woman, her bed, her room then Leota in that final moment at the door, abstracted, distant-looking, contemplating—what? It's simple to kill a frail old woman. You can scare her to death with a little ingenuity, or hold your good, strong hands over her mouth and nose for a few seconds, almost by accident. Leota had good, strong hands.

On the other hand, maybe the old lady had died of pure disappointment. That's not hard to do, either. But you wonder how many of them go that way with a little outside help. I had wondered before, many

times—but only God knows, and maybe He's tired of counting by now and doesn't care any more.

I heard Bill's voice ask the question again and I answered finally, "No, not a thing."

He sighed. "Well, maybe there's nothing to it, but it sure worked out neatly for her, didn't it, Sam?"

"It sure did," I said and hung up.

I made myself a drink before I dealt with the pile of mail, and I was glad I did. The third letter I opened was from Leota. It was postmarked yesterday, Monday. Inside was a check for \$827.00 and a brief message.

You'll note, she had written, that I've added a \$500.00 bonus to your fee. I believe you've earned it. After all, you did clear things up for me, didn't you?

It was signed simply, *Leota* and beneath her signature a P. S. read, *Come play tennis with me sometime. You don't scare me, Sam. I have an idea I can murder you.*

That was all. But I think it was enough. So often they find a way to let you know. It's an ego thing.

Someday I'll go play tennis with her and find out for sure.

I think.

McIVER'S FANCY

by
**CARL
JACOBI**



When the disappearances began he wanted to help the sheriff. But his dreams got in the way.

MCIVER WALKED up the lane and gazed with satisfaction at his property. The more he saw of it, the more acquiring it seemed a stroke of luck. It wasn't often one could buy ten acres and a house of his particular needs for the small

amount he had paid. He had wanted a place, modern, with an architecture of the past, in a secluded location where he could continue the solitary life he had led in the city.

Seen through a copse of cedars, the house looked

friendly and inviting. Then his gaze turned fifty yards east and he frowned.

Here were rank weeds, boulders and granite outcroppings. In the center was a pit with water so black it didn't even reflect the sky.

McIver turned back down the lane and continued to his house. His station wagon, parked in the driveway, reminded him that his weekly trip to town was overdue. Supplies were running low. That was one bad feature of living in a rural area. He got into his car and headed for Blacktop 3.

In Chaska he parked and went to several shops where he talked little to the tradespeople. In the hardware store, however, he found conversation pressed upon him.

"How do you like your place?" the hardware man asked as he packaged the nails McIver had purchased.

"I like it all right," McIver said.

"It's a nice house," the man said, "considerin' that it's been there close to a hundred years."

"I thought a hundred years ago this was all Indian country."

The man rang up the register. "Farther north, mebbe. Not here. But that pit on your place was once part of an old Indian

burial mound. Raiders dug it up, lookin' for pottery or somethin'."

"Well, it's an eyesore," McIver said. "I suppose I'll have it filled up one of these days."

He went out to his car, tossed the packages in the rear seat, walked down the hot August street and climbed the steps of the library. To the girl at the desk he said, "I'd like some information on the building of a summer house. Plans, pictures, anything you have."

She was gone about ten minutes and when she returned she looked at him with interest.

"You rarely hear of such things any more. Are you planning to build one yourself?"

McIver usually was not comfortable in the presence of women. But this girl was fragilely attractive with long dark hair and lustrous eyes. She appealed to him in a warm way. Before leaving he learned her name —Emily Hunter.

"I'll look forward to seeing you again," he said.

Chaska was an old town, built along the river. There was a central park with the business streets radiating out from it. The highway was far enough away so that the traffic did not disturb the quiet. To the east the bridge bore a sign several yards high marking the level where flood waters had inun-

dated several years before. The county-seat courthouse faced the park. As McIver strode past, a heavy-set man with a wide-brimmed hat came out and hailed him.

"Just wonderin' how you're gettin' along." Sheriff Tom Blunt lit a cigar with a kitchen match.

"I'm okay," McIver said.

"You figgerin' on stayin' in your place alone?"

"I don't suppose there's any law that says a man has to have a regiment with him," McIver replied testily.

Blunt grinned. "No law. Only your place is pretty far out."

"I'm used to being alone."

"What are you figgerin' on doing with the pit?"

"What do you mean, what am I going to do with it?"

"Well," Blunt said, "it's a sort of dangerous place. Ought to be fenced in or somethin'."

It was the second time that day the subject had come up and McIver was mildly irritated. The pit was the one disagreeable aspect of his property.

"I suppose I'll have it filled in eventually," he said.

As soon as he decently could, he broke away, returned to his car and headed down the road for home.

There in the solitude he enjoyed and which had been his

for years, he pored over the construction books Emily Hunter had selected for him. Since childhood he had dreamed of owning a summer house. There had been one in his past and the memory of happy hours in it remained with him. He decided to build one with a stone lower portion and a screened upper part, open to the air. Most of the material he could obtain in Chaska. The stones were available in the Pit.

He went to the pit, selected the stones with care and trundled them in a barrow to the house grounds. The work was hard and took a lot out of him.

But several weeks later, with the aid of two Chaska youths, he had the satisfaction of seeing the structure completed. It was really quite attractive, he told himself, with a tile roof and stained woodwork. Quickly it became a part of his routine. He began to spend the long summer afternoons there. A strange quality of contentment fell over him as he stretched out on the couch, sipping juleps from a frosted glass. And to his surprise he found that when he slept there at night, sleep, which had always been a problem in the past, now came with ease.

His sleep, however, was marred with dreams.

Like all men, McIver had had his share of dreams since childhood. But now they were different. Though he could remember no details on awakening, he did retain three impressions. He was being pursued. He was searching for something. And at the same time he was fleeing panic stricken with leaden feet unable to hurry. What he was searching for was not clear. Sometimes it was a jungle beast, sometimes a composite; but always female.

The dreams formed a cohesive unit, too, which in itself was strange. That is, they continued chronologically from one night to another. He would awaken, bathed in perspiration, shaking with fear. Yet the very anticipation of those dreams—they seemed to come only when he slept in the summer house—was like an opiate, making him look forward to them.

On a morning following a night when the dream had been particularly bad, McIver was on his veranda when the sheriff drove up.

"In the neighborhood," Blunt said, "so I thought I'd stop by. Seen any strangers around?"

"I haven't seen anybody," McIver said.

"Then you haven't heard what's happened the last few days?"

McIver shook his head. "I haven't been to town for more than a week."

"We've had a murder," Blunt said. "And a disappearance which might well be a second."

McIver stared.

"We found Jim Evan's wife—he's the jeweler—strangled in a ditch along Route forty-one. And Irene Trask hasn't been seen since Wednesday night.

"I've got two deputies working around the clock," Blunt continued, "and the state police are helping too. So far we haven't come up with anything. You'd better keep an eye out, living alone here."

McIver got up and walked to the end of the veranda. He came back and sat down again, a distant look in his eyes.

"A long time ago," he said, "I worked for a few months on the Chicago police force. It's ancient history now, of course, but I'd be glad to help in any way I can."

Blunt nodded. "I may take you up on that," he said. "I had a friend on the Chicago force. Man named Fallon. Did you know him?"

McIver shook his head. Blunt lingered a few minutes more, talked of the weather and other things, then left.

After he had gone McIver began a search of his grounds, al-

though he had no idea of what he was looking for. In the back of the house, facing the direction of the pit, he found one of the lower windows open, but there were no footprints near. There were, however, footprints leading from the driveway where he parked his car. Not far away was a little pile of cigaret stubs, as if someone had stood there a long time.

His car gave him more concern. Though he couldn't be sure, the gas supply seemed less and the odometer reading more than when he had last driven. But, he told himself, it would have been impossible for anyone to have taken the car without awakening him, even though the driveway was some distance from the summer house where he slept.

That Friday he drove to Chaska. The town was in a state of excitement. The missing girl, Irene Trask, had been found dead, and there was still another disappearance. Sheriff Blunt stood on the courthouse steps, talking to his two deputies and to a state trooper.

McIver went into the library to return the construction books. He found Emily Hunter in a state of hysteria. The newest missing girl, Ellen Philbin, she said, was one of her closest friends.

"I can't understand why any-

one would want to harm her," she said. "She was liked by everybody."

"A tall girl, thin, with reddish hair?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

He shook his head. "I've probably seen her around town." In an effort to calm her he changed the subject. She smiled a little.

"Anyone would know you're a bachelor," she said. "You're wearing one black sock and one brown. And you really should stay out of the mud, Mr. McIver. Tell me, did you finish your summer house?"

McIver nodded. Before he left he asked her to select for him several psychology books that contained chapters on dreams—for his sleeping fancies were giving him some concern.

Back home he opened one of the books and rifled through its pages. But it told him nothing he didn't already know.

He tried to think more about his days as a police officer. He had told Blunt he was on the Chicago force. But he could recall little of that work save a few trips in a prowler car, and even these were hazy, more like the recollection of an old gangster movie.

Late on a cheerless morning three days after his Chaska visit, he was awakened suddenly by a distant pistol shot. Ten

minutes later Sheriff Blunt appeared at the edge of his grounds, followed by one of his deputies.

"Thought we saw him," Blunt said disgustedly. "But it was only this old jacket hanging on a bush. We traced him across Barlow's swamp," he continued. "He seemed to be heading for the pit. Have you seen anyone?"

"Not a soul," McIver said. "Have there been any more killings?"

Blunt frowned. "No," he said, "no more murders but another disappearance. I believe you know her. The Hunter girl."

McIver's jaw went slack. "Not Emily!" he cried. He made fists of his hands. "Blunt," he said after a moment of silence, "You've got to deputize me. If you don't, I'll go on my own."

The sheriff nodded sympathetically. "All right," he said. "I understand."

After Blunt had gone, McIver went into the house and looked for his revolver. He found a gun. It wasn't a police special but an old Weble Scott automatic. Outside, he got into his station wagon and drove fast to Blacktop 3. Emily Hunter lived close to Chaska on 41, but he headed in the opposite direction toward the Victoria cutoff.

He didn't know why he did

this. He had never driven this cutoff, yet a recollection of the road seemed to come to him. The thought struck him that his actions were repetitive, like a movie film run a second or a third time. Then the spell was broken. He turned the car about and headed for home.

In the central room he slumped into a chair and took up one of the psychology books he had brought from the library. He must do something. He must think . . . Anything to steer his mind clear of the possibility that tragedy had struck down Emily Hunter.

The book fell open to a middle page and, half consciously, he began to read:

"The dream is the least understood part of the human psyche. The distortion, irrationality and lack of logical coherence which characterizes the usual run of them are the result of a multitude of subliminal perceptions and almost impossible to explain."

He turned a page.

"In 1945 the Belgian, Anatole Arman, quoted the case of a man who, while asleep, lived a life completely divorced from that of his waking hours. Yet he had no knowledge of that life. Such cases are rare and probably induced by some malignant condition."

McIver's eyes drifted from the

page to the table. There were, in addition to the things he had emptied from his pockets, several objects there he didn't remember seeing before—a length of sash cord, carefully bound with tape to prevent fraying and a short piece of rounded wood with a deep notch cut about six inches from one end. For the moment he was at a loss to explain them.

It was now more than an hour since Sheriff Blunt had told him about Emily Hunter, and he suddenly realized he had done nothing. He gathered the things from the table, went back out to his car and headed for Chaska. At the town outskirts a car suddenly pulled diagonally across the road in front of him.

The sheriff emerged and approached. "Oh, it's you. We're stopping all cars. Where you headed, McIver?"

McIver spread his hands on the wheel.

"No sense in our drivin' two cars," Blunt said. "I'll go along with you."

He walked back, drove his car onto the side of the road and, a moment later, climbed in beside McIver.

Uncertainly, McIver shifted gears and drove some moments in silence. Then he burst into speech.

"We can't just go blind. You

must have some idea where—"

"No, I haven't." The sheriff's face was immobile. "We don't know if Emily Hunter is alive or dead. We do know that the other victims were taken some place away from where they were first attacked. Also there was an interlude of about twenty hours between the time of their disappearance and their death. I'm hoping the killer will keep to the same schedule."

"Why would he do that?" McIver heard himself ask.

The sheriff shrugged. "There's no explaining a psychotic. I figger he goes so far, then cools. When the urge hits him again, he goes back and finishes the job."

"Why twenty hours?"

"A day and a night. I suppose he's got to sleep."

Blunt was a fool, McIver thought. The car moved past Houseman's Woods; then a fork appeared in the road; he swung into it.

"You're going in a circle."

"I know." McIver did not say that a strange compulsion guided his movements.

"When you were in Chicago, did you ever run into anything like this?"

"No."

"Know anything about fingerprints?"

"I know that Bertillon discovered them."

"How about ballistics?"

McIver shook his head.

"Most criminals don't use guns any more, as a matter of fact. They make too much noise and bullets can be traced. They prefer a knife."

"Knives can be traced too," McIver said.

"I suppose so," Blunt said. "But that pretty well exhausts the field."

"There's the garotte."

"Oh yes, the garotte."

"It goes back to the fifteenth century," McIver continued. "In Spain, it was used to break the spinal cord at the base of the brain."

"Have you read much along those lines?"

"It used to be my hobby."

Blunt expelled a mouthful of cigar smoke. "Where are we? Oh, yes, the old Virginia road."

"It leads into the pit from the other side," McIver said. "Nobody uses it any more."

The road was deep-rutted and willows along the narrow shoulders pressed closer. Presently the forlorn waste that was the Pit opened before them.

McIver stopped the car, got out and, like an automaton, began to pace along the water's edge. He stared straight ahead. His gait was uneven.

Blunt followed a few steps behind.

Then McIver's destination

loomed up, a cairn of black boulders fashioned by nature into a grotto with a jagged opening and a roof formed by an uptilted granite slab.

Suddenly McIver stopped. "*Over there!*" he cried.

Even as Blunt spun around he realized his mistake. But before he could move a rope encircled his throat, twisted with the notched wood as a fulcrum and choked off his windpipe.

The sheriff jerked both hands up in a vain effort to tear it away. His throat constricted as his breath was cut off. He felt his senses begin to leave him. His legs buckled.

But with a final desperate twist his right hand reached down and grabbed his holstered revolver. He clawed the weapon free, writhed sideways and fired.

The garotte fell loose. McIver uttered a cry and fell at the opening of the cairn. In that opening a third figure now became visible. The sheriff gave a sigh of relief as he saw that Emily Hunter was still alive. He removed the ropes that bound her, carried her across to his car and lifted her gently into the seat.

With McIver, who sat nursing the gunshot wound in his leg, he was less gentle.

"You've been a busy man," the sheriff said.

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Hero With a Headache

by JAMES HOLDING

Johnson sensed almost immediately that there was something wrong with Mrs. Stout. But when he decided to look into her problem, he was shortly in as much trouble as his poor hostess.

WHEN I BEGAN TO come out of it, the first things I noticed were a whirling sensation in my head with an undercurrent of thumping pain, and a very sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

I knew I ought to open my eyes but it didn't seem worth the trouble. So I kept them shut and went on feeling dizzy and nauseated until, vaguely, I realized that my whirling, aching head and the nausea were

familiar symptoms . . . something I'd gone through before, or thought I had. A kind of *déjà vu* feeling, as Liz, on the library's check-out desk, would express it. She always used egg-head terms like that. Or was it Kathy on the main desk?

Anyway, I knew damn well I'd felt this way before. Then I pinned it down—or thought I did.

I'd been sapped. Just as I was, once long ago, when I was



working under Lieutenant Randall at the Police Department. Sapped by an expert. I'd felt exactly this way then.

My head went on aching, but my stomach began to settle back out of my throat. I forced myself to open my eyes, which wasn't so tough to do after all. They came open with no more than an extra stab of pain as the light hit them. . . .

And there was Mrs. Stout, across the room from me, tied to a chair with a twisted pink sheet.

Then I knew I'd been sapped. Seeing Mrs. Stout brought it back to me almost whole. She was watching me, big-eyed and weeping, silently pleading with me to do something.

But what did she want me to do? I wasn't in too good shape to do it, whatever it was, because I was tied to a chair, too. My hands were fastened behind the chair back so tightly that my shoulder sockets screamed at the strain. Not with a sheet, though. This felt like clothesline. It went several times

around my thighs, waist and chest and fastened me to the chair tight as a politician's schedule.

We were in a den or study or office. It was a medium-large room with a desk and telephone, two deep leather chairs, the two straight chairs that held Mrs. Stout and me, wall-to-wall aqua carpeting, drapes of the same color and a whole wall of books. In a home like Mrs. Stout's, I guess you'd call it a library. Mrs. Stout was tied to the desk chair. My chair was across the room from hers in a corner near the bookshelves.

I licked my lips and was considerably pleased that I could, for that meant my mouth wasn't pasted shut with a strip of adhesive tape like Mrs. Stout's. I figured fuzzily that therefore I ought to be able to talk, so I tried it. My words came out, "Wheewhis Whow," thick and hoarse, instead of "Mrs. Stout" as I intended.

By this time my head had slowed its spinning enough so that I could think a little more clearly. All that got me was a feeling of guilt and embarrassment at how stupid I'd been to get into this mess in the first place. I'd made a fool of myself, and of poor Mrs. Stout, too, for that matter. And nobody to blame but myself. Old Hal Johnson, a trained police of-

ficer, acting like any callow Sir Galahad, for God's sake.

Not that I was actually a cop any more, but I'd *been* one. Come to think of it, maybe that accounted for my sticking my nose into Mrs. Stout's business instead of minding my own. My own business nowadays, let me explain, was simply chasing down overdue and stolen books for the public library. I was still fuzz in a way, I suppose, but sissy fuzz. Library fuzz, for Pete's sake.

The first name on my list of overdue library book-borrowers that morning had been Mrs. J. W. Stout, 1525 Washburn Drive, on the West Side. I like to start my day out with a little class as much as anyone, so I was glad the address was in a good neighborhood. The houses were mostly split-levels and spacious, set well back from the street with a lot of manicured lawn around them.

There are a lot of reasons—and I've heard them all, believe me—why people who borrow books from the public library fail to return them on time, and then ignore as well the overdue notices the library sends out to them as reminders. One reason is that the book borrower is just too lazy to bother bringing the books back and too rich to give a damn about the fines he'll have to pay as a result. One-

five-two-five Washburn looked like one of that kind to me. Lazy and rich.

It was ten minutes to nine when I pulled up there, parked behind a dark green van that said *Heritage Cleaners* on the sides in sloppy lettering and walked up the long flagstone path to the front door. On the way, I admired the Indiana limestone facing of the house and the gleaming Thunderbird standing on the left side of the open two-car garage.

I rang the doorbell, only it wasn't a bell, it was chimes. I could hear them sending musical notes through the house to announce my arrival. Nothing happened, so after a minute or so, I gave the chimes another thumbing and waited some more. This time, sounds of movement inside the door told me that somebody was at home after all. I could hear a chain rattling, then a bolt being turned, and then the door was drawn open and a handsome middle-aged woman with gray hair and dimples was looking at me inquiringly.

"Mrs. Stout?" I asked.

She nodded, but didn't say anything, although I could see her swallow as if she was getting ready to. I went into my usual spiel. "I'm from the public library," I said, showing her my identification card, "and

I've come about all those overdue books you have."

She looked at my identification card suspiciously. Then she cleared her throat and said, "Oh—oh, yes. Those would be the books I took out of the library to amuse my grandson when he was visiting us last month." She cleared her throat again. "I—I'll return them as soon as—as I can, Mr. Johnson."

I said, "I'll take them off your hands right now and save you the trip."

"Oh . . . Well, thank you," she said ungraciously. "Wait there a minute, then." She pushed the door to and went away. She didn't ask me in. Lazy and rich, all right, I thought, and not very polite, either.

I cooled my heels for a couple of minutes before she came back with an armload of children's picture books. "Here," she said in a harassed voice and thrust them at me. She was angry and distraught and I got the feeling that she thought I ought to apologize to her for bothering her so early in the morning. She was obviously anxious to get rid of me and no two ways about it.

As she was about to close the door in my face, therefore, I took a little malicious pleasure in saying, "Wait, Mrs. Stout. You owe a fine on these books.

They're 'way overdue, you know."

She gave me a strange look. "A—a fine? Oh, dear! How much?"

I told her the fine came to six dollars and thirty cents.

"Well—all right. W-wait till I get my purse," she stammered in what suddenly seemed like distress. She went away again.

When she returned, she handed me the exact amount of the fine and I said, "Thank you, Mrs. Stout, you know you can renew library books and avoid the fine," and I turned to leave. Then, to my great surprise, she suddenly reached out a hand and touched my arm lightly. I turned back to her.

She pointed to the top book of the pile I was carrying. "My grandson thought this one was particularly good," she said in a hushed murmur, and tapped her forefinger twice on the title. *The Robber of Featherbed Lane*. Both taps landed lightly on the word *Robber*. Her hand was shaking.

I went out to the street, deposited her books in the back seat of my car, and climbed under the wheel, vaguely troubled about Mrs. Stout. Old police habits of thought don't die easily. I couldn't help thinking that, if I were still a real cop, I'd be curious about the answers to several questions that

occurred to me in connection with my visit to Mrs. Stout.

Question one—why was Mrs. Stout, normally a pleasant and light-hearted woman if her dimples and smile lines meant anything, so disagreeable, impolite and, yes, agitated, over my simple demand for a batch of overdue library books?

Question two—how come Mrs. Stout stammered noticeably sometimes and didn't stammer other times?

Question three—where was the driver of the *Heritage Cleaners* van that was still parked ahead of my car.

Question four—why did Mrs. Stout delay my departure at the last minute with a trite remark about her grandson when, up to them, she'd been trying like crazy to get rid of me?

Finally question five—how about that trembling finger tapping the word *Robber* so pointedly?

To tell you the truth, I didn't have the guts to drive away from Mrs. Stout's house leaving these questions unanswered behind me. I knew I'd feel like an all-American heel later on if I did. I've always been a sucker for women in distress, anyway. That's one reason why I'm not with the Police Department any longer.

So, I thought, *let's see if Mrs.*

Stout is really caught in a pickle.

I looked up *Heritage Cleaners* in the telephone book and the City Directory—both of which I carry in my car to check addresses when I'm on the job—and you know what? There was no firm called *Heritage Cleaners* listed in either one. Yet not more than four feet ahead of my car's front bumper sat a dark green van with *Heritage Cleaners* lettered on the sides, big as life.

What would you think? What would anybody think? The same thing I thought, I'm sure. Except that what you'd do about it would probably be much more sensible than what I did about it. You'd call the cops. But I used to *be* a cop, so I thought I could handle Mrs. Stout's trouble by myself.

I crawled out of my car and went up the flagstone walk to Mrs. Stout's front door again. I rang the chimes again. In due course, the door was opened again. This time, though, it wasn't Mrs. Stout who faced me. It was a smooth-faced man of indeterminate age with a black mustache, long sideburns and hair cut as short as my own.

I said, "Mrs. Stout, you didn't give me back—*oh!* You're not Mrs. Stout, are you?"

"No," he said, "I'm Mr. Stout. Can I help you?"

"Well, I'm from the public library, Mr. Stout, and a few minutes ago, when I collected some overdue library books from your wife, she must have missed one. She paid the fines on all of them, but I checked the titles and she still has one book."

"Which book is that?" He raised an eyebrow.

I said the first thing that came into my mind. "A picture book called *Cato the Kiwi Bird*."

He nodded. "It's possible my wife still has it. But she's very busy right now. So come back some other time, okay?" He began to shut the door.

I lowered my right shoulder and charged the door with it like a defensive tackle on the blitz. I thought I could use the door as a battering ram to throw him off balance enough, even if he had a gun as seemed likely, to give me time in the confusion to get inside the house where I could handle him.

But no. A split second before my shoulder hit the closing door, he suddenly reversed his field and pulled the door wide *open* instead of slamming it shut. The result was that, failing to encounter the expected resistance to my lunge, I catapulted through the opening, tripped on the doorsill and went

down full length on my face inside the entrance hall.

Then Mr. Stout closed the door. I heard it slam. I twisted my head around and caught a brief glimpse of a snub-nosed automatic in Mr. Stout's left hand. He stooped over me and gound the barrel of the gun painfully into my back at about the place where I imagine my right kidney is.

"What was that book again, friend?" he asked in an expressionless voice.

"*Cato the Kiwi Bird*," I repeated, feeling like a fool but also knowing that one little move now without his permission could get me killed.

"It sounds fascinating," he said. "I'll have to read it sometime."

I heard a swishing sound. Then my head exploded in a big burst of orange fireworks.

THE FIREWORKS were still flashing faintly now as I looked across the library at poor Mrs. Stout, gagged with adhesive tape and tied in her chair with a pink sheet. I tried my voice again, and this time it came out much better.

"Mrs. Stout . . . "

She widened her eyes. There was still terror in them.

"He wasn't your husband, was he?" I said next. A dumb question.

She shook her head vigorously.

"I'm sorry," I said, struggling against the clothesline on my wrists. "He was too cute for me. Did he hurt you?"

She shook her head again. Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Good," I said. "Have I been out long?" My headache was making my thoughts hazy and muddled.

This time Mrs. Stout accompanied her headshake with a frantic crosseyed look down her nose toward the mouth-sealing tape below it. Only then did it occur to me that the conversation was going to remain pretty one-sided unless I could somehow arrange for Mrs. Stout to join in.

I gave up on my wrists and tried wriggling my feet. They were tied together with more clothesline. Not crossed, and not tied to the chair—but tied together so tightly that I hardly knew they were mine. I was relieved, all the same. Maybe the guy who sapped me wasn't such an expert after all. No tape on my mouth, ankles not crossed, and not even fastened back under the chair seat to keep my feet off the ground. Amateur stuff.

I leaned forward, my weight tipping my chair onto its front legs, my bound feet the third

leg of a tripod that made it easy for me to stay balanced that way. Then I straightened my legs, put my full weight on my feet, and began to hop very carefully, a few inches per hop, toward Mrs. Sout. I was hunched over like an arthritic dwarf, I had an antique ladder-back chair strapped to my back and legs, but my feet were on the floor and I was capable of locomotion of a sort. That was the important thing.

Reaching Mrs. Stout's chair, I paused and bent toward her face as though I was going to kiss her on the cheek. Instead, I nipped a corner of her adhesive tape between my teeth and ripped off her gag—far enough, anyway, so her mouth was uncovered. She winced and moaned as the tape came unstuck—all the same, she pulled her head back hard to help me dislodge the tape more easily.

The first sound that came out of her was a sob. The second was a name. "Jamie!"

"Who's Jamie?" I said.

Still crying, she worked her mouth painfully. "My husband!" she moaned then. "They took him away!" Her sobs came faster.

"They?" I said.

"Three of them. They had guns! Oh, Jamie . . ." she could hardly get the words out.

"I saw one of the guns," I remembered. "You said *three* men?"

She wailed, "And it's my fault they hurt *you*, too! That—that man untied me and made me answer the door when you rang. He told me to get rid of you if I didn't want to get shot. He—he pointed his gun at me all the time I was giving you those library books!"

"Forget it," I said. "You were brave to warn me the way you did. I was the dumb one." I tried to make my headache go away by shaking my head. That made it worse. I said, "Two men took your husband and left one man here with you, the one who slugged me? Is that it?"

She nodded. "The one who hit you left ten minutes ago." Her eyes went to an electric clock on the desk to confirm that. "The telephone rang while he was tying you up, and he answered it, and then he left right away."

That explained my amateur tying job—he hadn't waited to finish. "What did he say on the telephone—could you hear?"

"He said 'Okay', that's all."

I began to see the pattern. "What time was it when they took your husband away?"

"We were still at breakfast—about ten minutes after eight, I guess." She closed

her eyes and shivered uncontrollably.

"In your husband's car?" I asked, remembering the empty spot in the garage beside the Thunderbird.

She didn't seem to hear me. She started to squirm around frantically in her chair, trying to shed the twisted sheet that bound her and moaning like a wounded animal.

I tried again. "Mrs. Stout, where does your husband work?"

She sobbed convulsively, her mouth making ugly moves in her tear-streaked face. Her dimples made her look worse, somehow. The strip of adhesive tape was still dangling from one cheek and her eyes were wild. Hysteria was catching up with her.

I shouted to get through to her. "Mrs. Stout! Listen to me! Where does your husband work? Work! Tell me! Don't you want to save your husband Jamie?"

She stopped squirming as suddenly as though turned to stone. The wildness went out of her eyes. "He's the cashier of the Second Fidelity Bank," she said in a dead voice.

"Thanks," I said. I hopped three hops to the other side of the desk, where the telephone was, and set my chair down again on all four legs. Then I

stretched forward as far as I could and flipped the telephone receiver off its stand by coming down hard on one end of it with my chin. It was a touch-type phone. The receiver fell face up on the desk, with the dialing buttons right there under my nose.

I took this as a good omen and dialed the police emergency number with it—my nose, I mean. I had to stop and wait, after each jab at a button, to give the receiver time to stop rocking on its spine, but I finally got the number dialed. Then I got my left ear as close to the receiver as I could, and waited for the police to answer.

When they did, I raised my voice in an official bellow and yelled "*Emergency! Get me Lieutenant Randall!*" The cop on the board must have thought I was a captain, at the least, because Randall was on the wire in almost exactly nothing flat.

"Lieutenant," I said, "this is Hal Johnson. Don't say anything, just listen for a minute, okay? I'm pretty sure the Second Fidelity Bank was robbed about half an hour ago by two men with the unwilling help of the bank's cashier, Mr. J. W. Stout. He was probably forced to open the vault after the time lock was off but before the bank opened for business at nine.

The cashier's wife and I were held prisoner in Stout's home, one-five-two-five Washburn, by a third man during the heist. We're still prisoners.

"But get this—our guard left us fifteen minutes ago, immediately after getting a phone call here. He was probably going to pick up his pals and the loot somewhere near the bank downtown. He's driving a dark green Chevrolet van labeled *Heritage Cleaners* and should be about halfway to town by now on either Murchison or Cambria Avenue. There's still time to get the van—but don't stop it until it makes the pick-up. You got all that, Lieutenant?" I drew a deep breath.

As cool as a well-digger's shirt tail. "I got it," he said. "Hold on, Hal. Be right back."

He went away, presumably to start a little action. While he was gone, I sent comforting upside-down looks at Mrs. Stout, whose sobbing had now subsided to intermittent catches of breath. Four minutes ticked slowly by on the desk clock before I heard Lieutenant Randall's voice squeaking in the receiver again.

"I've got it started, Hal. We're checking on the bank and the cashier right now. Patrol car three-o-three has your green van in sight on Murchi-

son. And I've got another car on its way to you."

"Fine," I said. "I'll tell Mrs. Stout that help is on the way."

THAT EVENING, Lieutenant Randall telephoned me at home. "What happened to you," he asked, "after my man cut you loose this morning? With everybody waiting to give you the conquering hero treatment."

"Hero treatment?" I said. "Then the bank *was* robbed?"

"Sure. I been trying to locate you all afternoon to tell you."

"What about the cashier, Mr. Stout? Was he hurt?"

"Not a bit. Locked in the vault with the vault guard after the thieves had cleaned out the cash. Then they just walked out of the bank like two customers when the bank opened at nine."

"You nailed them, I hope?"

"Sure. Your green van led us right to them—and to the loot, too, Hal. Don't overlook the loot. Two hundred and twelve thousand dollars. That's why the hero treatment was ready for you, boy. Mrs. Stout told us how you happened to get mixed up in the thing. So why didn't you stick around to take a bow?"

"I had a hell of a headache," I said.

"Too bad, too bad," Randall

said. "I knew his cat-yellow eyes would be as bland and unfeeling as two egg yolks, even as he sympathized. "The fellow who slugged you was Teddy Thurbald, incidentally. A pro. How's the headache now?"

"I still have it," I said.

"Then why'd you go back to work this afternoon?"

"I didn't. I came home to bed."

He clicked his tongue. "You always were soft-headed, Hal—especially about broads. You haven't changed."

I didn't answer that one.

"Well, you'll probably be okay by Monday. Mr. and Mrs. Stout can thank you then."

I said, "They'll have to do more than thank me. They owe me money."

Randall sounded scandalized. "You mean you want a *reward* for helping those nice people and their bank?"

"Hell, no," I said, "but since I took the day off today, I won't get Mrs. Stout's overdue library books back to the library until Monday. So they owe me three more days' fines."

"They shouldn't begrudge that," said Randall, "since you saved the bank two hundred and twelve grand. Matter of fact, this whole thing is going to look good enough on my record so that I might even pay your extra fines myself. How much do they come to?"

"Eighty-one cents," I said grouchily and hung up. My head was killing me.

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS

Coming Headliners

A CONTOUR FOR KILLING by BRETT HALLIDAY

A New Mike Shayne Novelet

TICKET TO HARPERVILLE by JERRY JACOBSON

An Alarming Complete Novelet

A TOUCH OF RED by EDWARD D. HOCH

A Story of Universal Crisis



TO DIE A HERO

by
**ROBERT
KISSEL**

Killian wanted death to come quickly—until he found himself face to face with assassination.

DETECTIVE EDDIE KILLIAN walked the five city blocks from the doctor's office to the Cross Keys Tavern, in shock. He barely acknowledged a friendly greeting from Ralph, the owner, behind the bar, and hurried through the noisy Friday afternoon crowd to the isolation of a corner booth near the rear door.

He had steeled himself for the worst kind of news, but when it came he was unprepared. Inoperable, early-middle stage, said the doctor with devastating candor. With cobalt,

chemotherapy, he had ten months, possibly a year.

After 31 years as a policeman, death was nothing new—except that it always happened to somebody else, the good and the bad, usually violently, with no time for contemplation. He had attended countless funerals, heard all the eulogies and the laments, and had come to despise the rituals of death.

To him, the idea of an after-life was a sop, part of the mythology of dying. Death was final. There were no lingering, cosmic effects, just a void for

eternity. All that he had accepted years ago. He had not anticipated that, when his turn came, it would be a long and terrifying ordeal.

He wondered how much better it would have been if, six months ago, he had been killed in line of duty by the young robber he had surprised in a holdup attempt. In the long run, it would have been much easier on Martha and the two kids at home.

It would have been quick and he would have died a hero's death. They would have been spared the prolonged grief and helplessness of a slow death. Before it was over, they would be asking themselves in private why it had to take so long.

In the middle of a second bourbon, Killian decided there was a better way to die. In the semi-darkness of the booth no one saw him ease the police special out of the shoulder holster and place it in his lap. The grip was cold to his touch, but like an old friend that could be depended upon in a crisis.

The thought of using a gun as the way out came naturally to him. Violence had been part of his life—it had even sought him out at times, or so it seemed. He had taken two other lives in the line of duty before the one six months ago. The first two were wild gun

battles in lonely riverfront alleys with professional criminals who had nothing to lose.

The last one had been different. In broad daylight, with 16 people looking on, he had walked into the building and loan office near his home to make a mortgage payment. Inside was a young hood, barely 20 years old, with a nylon stocking over his head, trying to rob the place.

When Killian went for his gun, the youth had got off two wild shots. With the third shot, his automatic had jammed. Killian still remembered the stunned way the man had looked at the faulty weapon in his hand, standing immobile as a statue until he was dropped by a single shot in the head.

It was with anger Killian remembered the investigation which followed. Some of the self-styled citizen "watchdog" groups and the usual clutch of bleeding hearts had got much ink in the papers by saying that since the bandit's gun had jammed, he was defenseless, that it had not be necessary to shoot him. Killian had been so enraged by it that, after the hearing, he had made an indiscreet remark to a reporter which not only made the evening newspaper but the six o'clock television news.

The recurring pain in his

stomach intruded suddenly. He wondered why he would be re-living an incident that was closed, that no longer had significance or importance. The only relevant thing at the moment was the .38 revolver in his lap. One squeeze of the trigger would finish it, once and for all.

He rested the muzzle against his chest just to make sure he had the right spot. It had to be done quickly and cleanly. Suddenly, he felt weak, perspiration heavy on his forehead, his hands slick and clammy. Until a few minutes ago, he had never thought of suicide. He had always believed that no human could destroy his own life unless temporarily insane. But, here he was, on the threshold, needing only a final spark of will power to pull the trigger.

He relaxed the slight pressure on the trigger because he was conscious that someone had stopped at his booth and was staring at him. He was a young man in his early twenties, bearded, his long yellow hair in strings around cold blue eyes. Killian forgot names, but never faces. There was something both strange and familiar about the youth staring down at him.

"Detective Killian?" the boy said.

Killian nodded wearily, re-

turned the gun to his lap but kept his hand below the table.

"What can I do for you?"

"What I want will take only a few minutes."

"I'm not feeling well. I was just about to leave."

The man sat down, put both hands beneath the table and leaned forward, as if to give him a better look at his face.

"Do you know who I am?"

Killian shook his head, still trying to remember the face.

"I'm Fred Ritter, Henry's brother. The guy you shot down in cold blood," he said.

"Anybody who walks into a bank with a gun in his hand is fair game," Killian said. "Your brother was a lousy shot. That's the only reason I'm still here."

"I want to read you something," the man said. He reached into his jacket pocket with his right hand and brought out an old piece of newspaper, which he spread on the table between them. His left hand remained under the table. As he reached into his pocket, Killian's hand found the butt of his gun. After 31 years, the move came as a conditioned reflex.

The man began reading quickly, as if he'd memorized it a long time ago:

"... when Detective Killian was asked if he were sorry to have killed the young bandit,

Killian replied that no policeman ever likes to take a life, but Ritter had a long criminal record, and if he hadn't been killed, some mushheaded judge would have put him on probation again, and the next time he might have killed an innocent person."

"I guess you'll say you were misquoted," Ritter said, returning the clipping to his pocket.

Killian shook his head. "I'm not denying anything, except that it was said minutes after killing another human being. Ten minutes later, I would not have said it."

"I've been following you for six months, just waiting to read that to you," Ritter said.

Killian also remembered the quote. More than once, he had wanted it back.

"Okay, now you read it," Killian said. "What do you want from me?"

"I got a gun under the table aimed at your belly and I'm going to kill you. With all the noise in here, I'll be gone before anybody knows what happened."

Killian couldn't believe what he had heard. A minute later, he might have killed himself. Now somebody wanted to do it for him. It was a chance to be a hero yet.

"You haven't got the guts," Killian said quietly. "You

punks are all mouth and no go."

Ritter's cold blue eyes came to him full of hate. Killian returned the look, and knew that the man across the table from him did have the nerve to do it. He sat back against the booth, as if to brace himself for the bullet. At the same time, his hand closed around the butt of his own gun in his lap.

"Go ahead, punk. It'll make you a big man with the creeps you run with," Killian taunted.

The yough swallowed hard, hesitated, his eyes fierce in concentration. The click of a hammer being pulled back to firing position sounded over the throb of hard rock bursting from the juke box speaker overhead.

Suddenly, he didn't want to die. Ten months, a year maybe. Chemo-therapy, remission. What if they were wrong?

Later, the people near the booth would remember hearing only one shot, because the two came simultaneously. Killian felt the table shudder and collapse as Ritter's bullet slammed into the wooden center support. Splinters sharp as needles penetrated his knees and legs, but there was no surge of death in his belly.

In slow motion, the man across the table straightened up as if to leave, a look of terrible

surprise in his young face. Then he fell across the slanting table, blood from his mouth mingling with spilled whiskey.

Ralph was the first to reach the booth, furtively palming a small automatic in his right hand. Killian was sitting in the booth, dazed, still holding his revolver. He grinned, almost apologetically to Ralph, standing above him.

"The damned fool tried to kill me," he said in a voice as shaky as his hands.

"I'll call for help. Sure you're okay?" Ralph said, as the crowd pressed around the booth, looking silent and wide-mouthed at the dead man.

Hours later, Killian was sitting in the office of the chief of

police while the chief slowly read the official report of the shooting. When he finished, he said:

"How did you know he was gunning for you?"

"I didn't."

"You must have had some warning or he'd have killed you."

"I had a premonition when he walked in."

On the way out the chief thought of something else. "How are you making out with the doctors these days?"

"I saw him today," Kilian said. "It's going to be touch and go for a long time."

He went out into the empty corridor. He still didn't want to go home.

In the Next Issue and Exclusively Yours—

A MAGAZINE OF ALL NEW AUTHORS

Excepting the Complete MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Our January edition is going to be something entirely new in the crime fiction magazine field—an issue that, save for the lead novel by Brett Halliday, will be filled entirely with stories written by unsold authors—or by the first crime stories of authors published only in other fields. See how they stand up!

VANTAGE POINT

by MARJORIE VAN DER BOOM

When Dr. Milt Lyvett tripped over the dead body of his niece on his own front lawn, it ballooned up into an odd case of murder.

DESPITE BEING IN BATHROBE and slippers, Milt Lyvett, M.D., covered the veranda, the steps, and most of his front walk in a fair imitation of his track-star form of forty years past. Even at 6:00 a.m., he saw it was going to be a tight race with the collie pup from next door for his *Los Angeles Times*. Thoughts of the front page, the sports section, and the market reports, strewn in tatters, spurred him on.

Then he stumbled against what felt like a rolled-up blanket protruding from beneath the hydrangea branches he never got around to trimming.

He looked down. Hastily he stepped back. At his feet lay the body of a young woman.

He shook his head briskly to clear the last cobwebs of sleep. Alertness quickened in his blue eyes. Kneeling beside the girl, whose head was twisted, rag-doll fashion, at an impossible angle, he automatically evaluated the night temperature, the stage of rigor mortis and the degree of cyanosis. As he came up with a good estimate of the time of death, the reddish tint in the tumbled dark hair which hid most of her face struck him as being familiar. A not outstandingly pretty



girl, but sparkling and friendly, who made you glad to be a part of the human race.

Warned off by some message trying to come from his subconscious, he concentrated on the frothy yellow dress, which he had never seen before. Streaks of pink stained it, matching similar daubs that blurred the outline of her lips. Then, he brushed back her hair.

His hand froze. For a moment he crouched there, stunned. Then, with a gentle pat of her cheek, he rose, his knees creaking.

Lips pressed tight, he strode back into the house. There, he dialed a familiar phone number, checked who was on duty at Homicide and chose his man. "Banning?" he queried. "Milt Lyvett here."

"Morning, Doc. What you got for us?"

"The body of a young woman, recently deceased."

"You've always got bodies. Could you be more specific?"

"Not on my front walk—and not someone related to me."

"Now, Doc, I know you've been working hard, but would you repeat that please?"

"About midnight, my niece, Sara Lyvett, died, the victim of a homicide. Presumably whoever did it placed her body on my front walk." A tremor crept into his voice.

"Doc—Doc—take it easy! Why would anyone want to do that?"

"I I knew, I'd be out after him. And in case you're tempted to pass this along to one of your minions, she was one of your own. A parking meter maid. I helped her get the job."

"We'll be right there." Banning hung up.

On guard near the body, Milt paced the sidewalk, his bathrobe flapping. Twice he halted by the still form. Her parents had died in the same accident that killed his wife two years before. So, they had comforted one another. He remembered Sara bursting in one evening recently. "I've found the neatest pizza place. Come on, I'll take you to dinner—for a change."

When an official car at last pulled up to the curb, Lyvett strode across the parking to wait by the passenger side. "About time," he told Banning.

The investigator heaved his massive frame out of the mid-compact while his partner, Cordova, came around the rear of the car. *God, they grow big these days*, Milt thought. I hope the bastard who killed Sara has to face them.

"There," he indicated, pointing.

"Christ, I'm not blind!" Banning said.

The effect of cheer created by

his blond hair, fair skin, and vivid blue eyes seemed to dim. "I remember her patrolling around Civic Center. A very nice girl. So she was your niece, Doc. That's sure too bad."

Cordova's olive-hued, El Greco face had grown even longer. "Can't have been more than twenty-five. Any idea who did it?"

Milt shook his head.

Banning cleared his throat. "Do you suppose she could have become friends with the wrong sort of guy?"

"If you mean rapist—say so." Milt spoke with his usual asperity. Nevertheless, inside he cringed. Forcing himself to adopt a professional attitude, he said slowly, "In my opinion, Sara'd never get into a car with a man she didn't know. She had plenty of friends, plenty of interests, and a lot of plain, everyday commonsense." He raised his voice to be heard over the rumble of the lab truck driving up.

"All right," Banning said. "Let's finish up inside, while the lab boys take over here."

With a last look in the direction of the hydrangea bush, Milt gave a hitch to the tie of his robe. Then, ushering the two men into the house and on into his den, he motioned them to a couch. Seated behind his desk, he peered at them over a

stack of books on forensic medicine.

"How do you propose to find the man who murdered my niece?"

Cordova responded with a series of routine questions that nearly drove Milt up the wall. In the meantime, Banning stared up at the ceiling, hand locked behind his head. "A meter maid," he mused when the questions ran down. "Who'd want to kill her? I know it sounds far out, but do you suppose someone could have blown a fuse because she gave him a ticket?"

"For parking?" Cordova asked.

Banning lowered his gaze. "Some people become infuriated over any ticket they think they don't deserve. It doesn't take much to make them see red."

"I remember a guy who was killed in a fight over fifty cents," Lygett said.

"If a fellow with a temper like that came back to his car and found a meter maid writing him a ticket," Banning said, "he might give her a very bad time. A girl's a different proposition than an armed officer."

"Say,"—Milt broke in—"don't all traffic citations have a box where the officer can check 'hostile' or 'cooperative' about the violator? Couldn't you look through a meter maid's tickets

for the last week or two to find the persons she marked as hostile?"

"Sure—why not?" Banning rose. "We'll be checking everywhere. But don't get your hopes up too much, Doc. I don't have much faith in this ticket angle."

Milt nodded. "I know. Still, give me a call and report what's happening, will you?" As they promised, he escorted them to the front door.

Waiting, Milt went through his daily getting-dressed routine, pushed aside a dish of cornflakes he'd poured when they reminded him of Sara, then rifled through the pages of the newspaper, knowing no more when he finished than when he begun.

At last the phone rang, and he pounced. "Yes?"

"BANNING, doc. Not much to report. We did find twelve parking citations issued by meter maid, Sara Lyvett, and marked 'hostile'. They don't mean a thing to me. Do you want me to read the names?"

Milt hesitated. Reluctant to return to his do-nothing status, he said, "You might as well."

Banning began to drone off names. At the tenth, Milt interrupted. "Wait a minute. Carl Hawthorne—I testified at an inquest against a man by that

name. What's the date of that ticket?"

When Banning told him, Milt counted back. "The same day."

"But what possible connection could there be between your testifying against a man at an inquest and his getting a ticket from a meter maid he happened to meet?"

Annoyed because an idea flitting around in his skull refused to land, Milt retorted, "You're the man with the computer. Why don't you see what your machine turns up on him?"

"We'll give it a try. I'll get back to you later."

As the afternoon wore on, Milt decided "later" depended which side of the fence you sat on. When Homicide wanted a lab report from him, it meant pronto. Put the work on their shoulders and *manana* was good enough for him. While the bastard who had killed Sara went on his merry way . . .

The house grew too small. His lanky strides carried him from the bookshelves to his desk and back again as if the room were a cell, while the descending sun crept to high tide on the carpet.

Scooping up his jacket from the arm of the couch, he headed for the car parked in his driveway. A few moments in traffic persuaded him he wasn't the only man in town, that you

couldn't expect miracles even from Banning, who was tops in his field. Still, when he parked outside the police building, he hopped out without locking his car, dodged among pedestrians lost in the maze of official offices and arrived at the quarters housing Homicide very short of breath.

Admitted to Banning's office, he managed, "What did you find out about Hawthorne?"

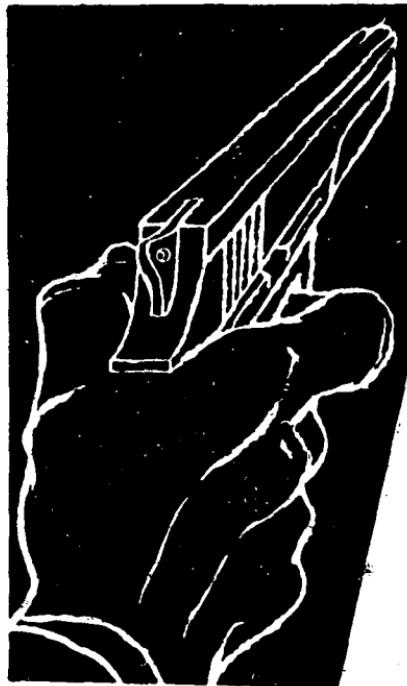
"Hi, Doc." The lieutenant looked up from a desk awash in paper. "You better sit down before you burst a blood vessel. I just tried to call you. We thought at first the computer'd come up with something on Hawthorne. Seems he wanted to join the force—rejected as unsuitable."

"So," Milt said slowly, "he might not appreciate a girl giving him a ticket. A meter maid's sworn, like any cop."

"Right. But—"

"Why'd he leave the body for me to find? He may be 'unsuitable' but he's not dumb." Then he paused. "There aren't many Lyvets around. Doesn't an officer sign a ticket he issues?"

Banning looked up, interested. "Your niece's citations are right here on my desk." He rummaged, then leafed through the sheath. "Signed her name clearly enough to read at a glance."



Tilting back, he consulted the ceiling. "Suppose he took a look and said, 'Sara Lyvett—are you related to the pathologist by the same name?' If he'd given her a bad time, would she still have answered?"

Milt considered, then said, "I'm sure she would. I can hear her, 'He's my uncle—what did you think?' Afterwards, she'd have been mad at herself for giving him the time of day. Chances are, she'd have given a toss of her head and whipped off and away on her three-wheeler."

Lyvett glimpsed the thought

he'd been unable to bring into focus earlier. An unpleasant taste rose in his mouth. His heart sank. "You think it wasn't the ticket—that he took revenge for my testimony at that inquest by killing Sara?"

"Perhaps he's a guy who'll do anything to get even if he's crossed. There's a good chance, though, he was at work at the time your niece died."

"Where?"

"Cordova's checking. A carnival in town."

"Carnival?"

"He runs the ferris wheel."

Milt said, "The pink on her dress and face—it could be cotton candy." He rose. "And she loved carnivals."

"You've seen him. What do you think is the best approach?"

Milt hesitated, then said, "Thinks he's God's gift to women. He has an Afro of curly blond hair."

Banning nodded. "We have a policewoman—Pat Greenwood—we'll turn loose on him. "Don't worry. Cordova and I will be right there backing her up."

"I'll be there, too."

"Doc, this is our job. You leave it to us."

"Sara Lyvett was my niece."

"But Hawthorne knows you. If he catches sight of you, it's all over for us. You stay away."

Milt drew himself erect. "Allow me to remind you, young man, of the favors you've asked in the past. In the future don't bother to ask pathologist Lyvett."

A sigh rippled the papers on the lieutenant's desk. Grimly he jotted down an address and slid it across to the edge. "Be there at eight. At least don't wear the same suit Hawthorne saw you in before."

Milt rose and collected the note. "Don't you worry about me one little bit."

Banning eyed him suspiciously as he left the room.

Arriving at the carnival enough ahead of time to complete his preparations, Milt stopped just inside the grounds. Flashes of neon exploded against the night sky. The ferris wheel whirled. The pendulum of the loop-the-loop swung up and over, its occupants hanging upside down. A revolving tilted wheel sprouted metal cars shaped like flying saucers. Piercing screams rose from the rides, a rat-a-tat-tat from the shooting gallery, while children raced every which way shrieking as if the world had come to an end.

Determined, he pulled himself together. Wearing white shirt and pants, a candy-striped vest, and a beribboned straw hat Sara had decked him out in

as a honky-tonk piano player for a costume party, Milt fought his way to the man who peddled balloons. Indicating the cluster that floated at the end of strings, he confided, "I'm stuck with a bunch of kids here tonight. How much for those balloons?"

"Sixteen," the man counted. "Make you a deal. The lot for ten bucks."

"Used to be ten cents apiece," Milt muttered, paying up.

"These are helium. Tell the kids to hang on. They take off straight up and they're gone."

"Thanks." He strolled toward the row of concessions near the ferris wheel in search of Banning and Cordova. He found them, apparently deciding whether to pitch baseballs at a stack of wooden bottles or not.

"Buy a balloon?" he asked.

"God!" Banning groaned. "You still look like a doctor. I think Pat's persuaded Hawthorne to turn the ferris wheel over to a pal to run while he shows her around. So please get away from me."

Milt's gaze swept their conservative sport clothes, Banning's scowl, the ice cream cone disappearing into Cordova's doleful face. "At least I look more like a carnival. You two better try saying cheese."

As he moved toward a location where he could watch the

ferris wheel without being observed, the voice of Carl Hawthorne sounded close to his ear.

"Come on, Pat. let the guy guess your weight. Here, I'll hold your handbag."

Milt ducked around the corner of the nearest refreshment tent. From there he saw the curly-haired young man of the inquest reach for the purse an attractive brunette hugged coyly to her chest. "I don't want you to know how much I weigh," she giggled.

"You can't have any fun at a carnival acting like that." He tugged at the leather strap.

"You're mean!" Pouting, she relinquished her hold. Scarcely giving the concessionnaire time to announce, "One hundred and sixteen pounds," she settled into the swinging chair, her toes dragging the ground, steadyng it.

"Feet up, young lady." Arms akimbo, the concessionaire glowered at the scale until the fluctuating needle came to rest. Then, he grinned. "Right on the button. Come on, who's next?"

In those few moments, Hawthorne had squeezed the purse, his fingers lingering on an outline at the bottom shaped like a gun. As he returned the bag, his eyes skimmed the crowd. Milt retreated still more, hoping that alert gaze had

bypassed the Homicide men whose bulk loomed large in the predominantly juvenile atmosphere.

"The ferris wheel's next," Hawthorne said to the girl. "Still the best ride in the place."

They passed close enough to Milt for him to have tripped them. For some undefined reason, he wished he had when Pat Greenwood, innocently laughing, climbed aboard a two-seated swing while Hawthorne murmured a few words to the friend who had taken over his job.

Then, as their swing moved into space, Banning and Cordova materialized to claim the next vacancy. The wheel began to whirl, slowly, then faster. At the third revolution Hawthorne waved to the attendant and the swing he occupied with Pat Greenwood jerked to a halt. Obeying instructions, Milt merely watched the pair disappear in the eddy of people. Moving to the ferris wheel platform, he waited to point the direction to the Homicide men.

"Let us off this thing!" Banning shouted as they swirled by.

The attendant opened a lunch pail.

Milt spoke to him. "Maybe the guy's sick."

"Nah! He wouldn't sound like

that. The guy who works here regular said to leave them on—keep the wheel dressed."

Milt backed off. He watched Banning swirl by again, then hurried in the direction Hawthorne had led Pat Greenwood.

The wheel stopped. Gently rocking at the very top, Banning fumed, "There goes Doc with those damned balloons."

Cordova peered over the edge of the seat. "This guy's letting off people who got on after we did. Suppose Hawthorne caught on to us?"

"It's Pat I'm worried about." The wheel lurched forward.

Below, as Milt dodged after the girl and Hawthorne, he tried to figure out where they were going. The section ahead to his left contained the miniature rides for very small children. In a dark corner to his far right loomed the shadowy forms of trucks used to haul carnival equipment. In direct line lay the dimly lit parking lot.

The possibility that this was where Hawthorne had trapped his Sara speeded Milt in that direction. Then, in the thinning crowd toward the exit, he glimpsed a helmet of tight blonde curls above a bull-wide neck. He craned his own until he caught sight of a dark-haired woman, who appeared to drag her feet.

As Milt rushed forward, a tug

caught at the back of his vest. He tried, without success, to brush it away.

"Mister," piped a voice at his heels. "We want to buy a balloon."

Behind him stood two little girls about seven years old.

"Go home!"

"Two balloons." Gasping, the second child thrust out a dollar.

Extricating two strings from the cluster, he exchanged two balloons for the bill. He had covered three paces when the same voice caught him in mid-stride.

"Mister."

"Now what?"

"You're a funny salesman. You forgot the rest of your money. Balloons cost seventy-five cents."

He looked at the second bill, knowing he didn't have any change. He closed her hand around it. "For being such a nice honest girl you may keep this. Go ride the ferris wheel."

The minute they bounded off, he moved in the opposite direction. To his relief, the couple he had been following had not disappeared. Hawthorne was obviously prodding her on, while she held back. As they drew near the exit, she looked around, anxiously scanning faces. Her gaze flicked Milt, passed on, then returned, to focus in a question mark on the



balloons. Then, with a quick heave of her shoulders, she shrugged off her jacket, affording Milt a glimpse of the gun pressed to her ribs.

Instantly, Hawthorne moved to block it from sight. Capturing the jacket, he wrapped it tenderly about her shoulders. In those moments Milt advanced to within ten feet. "Can't leave without a balloon for your girlfriend." He strode forward, his face hidden behind a network of strings.

"Not tonight, buddy. Move along."

Milt lunged, ramming his own straw hat over the man's head. A first exploded in his midsection, forcing him to the ground. His attempted shout came out a croak. Where was Banning? In desperation he caught hold of a balloon and squeezed. Its pop vanished in the carnival air.

The girl had tried to escape. But now, Hawthorne wrenched her arm so hard that her face contorted with pain while Milt listened for the bone to break. All the time, Hawthorne laughed, pretending for the benefit of anyone who looked to be involved in a friendly scuffle.

Milt tried to get up, but fell back. At that moment, the beam of the carnival kleig light cut the night sky. He waited for the next flash. Then he let the balloons go.

From the top of the ferris wheel Banning saw. As they swept down, he pulled out his badge and thumped against the side of the swing. "Out!" he ordered when they approached the platform. "Right now!"

At last the wheel stopped. Banning shoved past the attendant who was lifting the safety bar. "You don't have to get mad, Mister. I just gave you a good ride like my friend said."

Banning didn't bother to answer. Helped by Cordova's bulk as well as his own, he plowed through the crowd, scattering it. Then he and Cordova ran for the location from which the balloons had ascended.

The doctor had struggled onto his knees. Now, in a wavering crouch, he staggered toward his man. As Hawthorne viciously jabbed a booted foot at his chin, the older man lunged to the side. Then he rammed his shoulder hard into Hawthorne's supporting knee.

The joint gave way, and Hawthorne rolled in the dirt. Pat Greenwood grabbed the gun and scrambled out of his reach. Cordova took charge of Hawthorne, while Banning helped Milt to his feet.

"Sure you're all right, Doc? Congratulations on a great job."

"Glad to see you." Milt clapped a hand on the lieutenant's broad shoulder, more for support than he would have cared to admit. "I did my best for Sara."

Pat Greenwood joined them. "He grabbed my purse and gun on the ferris wheel," she explained.

Milt's eyes narrowed. "I spend my days tripping over cops. I'm glad to find 'em around when I need 'em."

LONGSHOT



Gold knew the time of the heist and its value—but he did not know the what or where of the robbery.

by GIL STERN

THE GARRETT RESTAURANT is my favorite, especially at ten in the morning. Nancy serves me my favorite sweet roll and a hearty cup of black coffee that she keeps filled without disturbing my concentration. And what

am I concentrating on? What else but the sports pages of the Turf Edition of the morning paper.

It's strictly a hobby with me now. I used to be hot and heavy on the horses but that was be-

fore marriage, the kids and the job—chief accountant, almost comptroller, for the Western States Financial Loan Company. So what I do now is make mental bets instead of real money bets. It's not exciting like it used to be but one does what one can. So I appreciate my 10 A.M. break when, for a little while, I'm so to speak back in harness.

My concentration is very deep during this interval so when I heard men behind me arguing, it must have been on a second or third round of disagreements.

"*Quiet!* This ain't the place to talk."

"I just want to remind you guys of the cut I'm getting!"

Then I didn't hear anything, shrugged it off and went back into my own little world of jockeys and horses, trainers and winners' circles. The concentrating didn't last.

"Okay. Everything's on schedule," a low, husky voice said.

"Sure. We set our watches before we got on the plane."

"Right," a third voice acknowledged. "Want to synchronize them again?"

"No. The heist goes off exactly at four-thirty sharp," the low, husky voice said.

The conversation stopped but my heart picked up the pace.

Heist? Didn't that mean robbery? Now I strained to listen.

"By tomorrow we'll each have a hundred G's." The husky voice now exuded enthusiasm.

"I get the same cut, remember?"

"*Quiet!*" The third voice spoke with threatening finality.

I felt certain one of the men peeked over the booth separation to see if anyone was seated behind. I buried my head in the paper and tried stopping from shaking. I dared not turn to see if my feelings were correct. Then I heard shuffling. They were getting up to leave.

Fear crowded into my throat as they shuffled past. I kept my face in the newspaper, refusing to look up for even an instant. Finally, I forced my eyes upward but by then I caught barely a glimpse of the men leaving the restaurant.

I sat there mulling over the conversation that had hit my ears and was now ricocheting through my mind. There was no doubt that they were going to pull off a big robbery—one big enough so they could reap one hundred thousand dollars each. The question now was whether to shake my fear and report what I had overheard—or to remain silent and not get involved?

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed unreal.

Then it dawned on me that I really had nothing I could report. I didn't even know what the men looked like? I didn't know where they were going to pull off this robbery? All I did know was the time—four-thirty.

It was obvious that the robbery would be later that day, since they had synchronized their watches. My mind raced wildly. They were from out of town, too, since they said they had synchronized their watches before getting on a plane. Once more I looked at my own watch. It was now ten-thirty. In six hours a robbery would be committed by those men.

"Have a good day, Mr. Gold." Nancy, my waitress was taking the checkout money at the exit to the restaurant. *My waitress and theirs!* My mind clicked like a stopwatch.

"Nancy," I addressed her, "those men seated behind me, did you ever see them before?"

"No. Why?"

I didn't want to alarm her with what I had overheard. However, she had seen them and if the police needed a good description, she should be best able to provide it. "Did you happen to get a good look at them?"

"Didn't pay much attention. A short bald guy and a rough looking ex-fighter type. The

third looked like an executive, well dressed. Oh yeah, they're from New York."

"New York? How do you know that?" I asked.

"The executive type, he gives me the eye and the other guy, the short one says, 'Forget it, we'll be back in New York tonight.' Imagine him thinking I'm an easy pickup?"

I paid my bill and went up to my office. I was ready to walk past Sharon, my secretary, when she brought me out of my thoughts with her high pitched voice.

"Better turn the pages, Mr. Gold."

"Huh?"

"The racing section," she pointed. "It's all marked up," she laughed. "It doesn't look good for any of the vice presidents to see their chief account is playing the horses."

Normally I would have joked with her, but instead I quickly turned the pages and I rushed into my office. She came after me. "Is anything wrong, Mr. Gold?"

"No, Sharon." I could see she was puzzled but I didn't want to go into any explanation. I smiled to reassure her and then told her to get me Ari Cristos, my neighbor and best friend. If anyone had a good sense of what should be done, it was Ari.

The call came in. "Hi, Goldie, what's the good word?" Ari's voice greeted me on the phone.

Instead of lighthearted banter, I immediately told him exactly what I had overheard and also included my own cowardice in not even attempting to get a good look at the men.

"Wow!" He exclaimed when I finished. In my mind's eye, I could see Ari's forehead furrow in thought while his left hand roughed through his curly gray hair. That's how he always looks when given a problem to solve.

"Any ideas, Ari?" I asked after a period of silence. I could feel the penetration of his deep, blue eyes even over the phone.

"There's nothing you can do, Goldie. You don't even know what these men look like. Even if you had a description down to their toenails, they haven't committed a crime as yet. Not only that, but even if they *were* planning a crime, you don't know where. All you have is the time—four-thirty. I say, forget it. Read the papers tomorrow and see where they pulled it off. Don't get involved."

"I feel funny, Ari. I feel like I should do more than just look at the clock. Suppose someone gets killed?"

"Forget it, Goldie. I got to run. Talk to you later." There

was a click and again I was alone with my thoughts. My first thought was a selfish one—why did it have to be me to overhear the conversation and why today, when I'm not busy, so I can't bury myself in work and shut out all that I heard?

Then I thought that I could busy myself handicapping the horses—that would fill the hours between now and four-thirty. As I considered doing that, another thought occurred. Why not put my handicapping skills to work and figure out what these men were up to—just from their conversation? I looked at the digital clock on my office wall. It read 11:31. Only five hours to come up with a winner.

Where to begin? I put a big yellow legal pad on my desk in the hope that I could place my thoughts clearly before me.

I scribbled 4:30 on the pad. Then I jotted *three men*. Where were they from? Nancy, the waitress, said New York. They flew in today and were flying out almost as quickly. They had synchronized watches so that meant they are on a precise schedule.

As I jotted things down I felt the old handicapping excitement. If they were coming in just for this job, then it must be a robbery that could only be

committed here. If they planned robbing a bank, why fly here? There are banks back east.

I pushed myself away from the desk and walked to the window. I had that lucky feeling. I was on to something, I could smell it.

They talked about a split, or rather arguing over a split. What was it? Ah, yes—a hundred thousand each. That meant they were sure of the amount. If they were robbing a store or bank, how could they be certain of having such an exact amount?

I began pacing. Where could I get a clue as to what kind of robbery assured them of their money? My eyes caught the newspaper lying on my desk. Maybe whatever brought them here was publicized?

I grabbed the paper and turned the pages slowly so I wouldn't miss any story, big or small. My eyes fell across a story on page twenty.

THE V.P. ART GALLERY on Lakeland Street was displaying a very rare and valuable sculpture. The value was close to a million. It was called the *Ramaden* from India. It was in this country on a cultural exchange showing. My face flushed with excitement, my hands tingled in anticipation of victory.



"This is *it!*!" I found myself shouting. Something like the *Ramaden* they could sell and get an exact figure. I continued reading the story and suddenly I found myself out of the money. The sculpture was on display in the morning. Then it was to be encased in a vault and at one-thirty picked up and taken aboard a ship for transport to India. At four-thirty, the time of the robbery, the sculpture would be well out at sea.

"Well, you can't win 'em all," I muttered. I continued my search through the newspaper but without finding any other special story that would fit. Now I had the handicapper's blues, when you feel like you can't pick a winner if your life depends upon it.

I was ready to give up but decided to scan the newspaper once more. Maybe it was a player's hunch, but this time I read the advertisements. I found an announcement about the unveiling of a jewelry collection worth a million dollars.

The doors would be open to the public at four-thirty. The time element was right. The only problem I had now was what to do with the information. As I sat there, thinking it over, my answer was buzzed in to me.

Sharon announced, "A

Lieutenant Pender of the police to see you, Mr. Gold."

That startled me. Before I could react fully, he was ushered into my office. He was of medium build, young looking, with a conservative light gray suit with that telltale tropical-fabric wrinkled look.

"Mr. Gold, you look surprised. Didn't Ari Cristos phone you? No, I guess from the look on your face. Anyway, Ari and I are members of the bowling league at church. After you called him about what you had overheard, he decided to talk it over with me."

"Good ol' Ari!" I countered. "He tells me to forget it and then he goes on and calls the police."

"Hold on!" Pender laughed. "This is all unofficial. I'm on my lunch hour." He looked at my digital clock on the wall—12:15. "Say, how about us having lunch while we talk this thing out?"

"Sure. Downstairs is as good a place as any, but first I want you to look at this." I showed him the jewelry advertisement in the paper.

"C'mon, I'm really on my lunch hour and starved," he said. I liked him. He was friendly, easy-going and quite unexcitable.

We both ordered hamburger plates and talked throughout

the meal. Upon closer examination, I realized Pender was older than his appearance had led me to believe. Years of experience were masked by his boyish, easy-going, gregarious manner.

"They didn't talk about jewelry, did they? So how do you know?"

I went through my reasoning process, filling him in on how there was to be an exact split of the money, how they flew in from the East so it had to be a special job and how the four-thirty time coincided with the doors being opened to the public.

Pender pulled a cigaret from a crumpled pack and leaned back in the booth. "It's all interesting and you may be right—but you could also be wrong." He inhaled deeply. "For one thing, the collection is heavily guarded. Anyone planning a robbery like that would require a lot of nerve and savvy."

The argument did not dissuade me. "Look, Lieutenant, this isn't a five-and-dime shop-lift. They plan a synchronized robbery. I don't know how they'll do it, but they know what they're after."

Pender remained calm. "You can't identify them?"

"I told you I hardly saw them. They could be back in

this restaurant right now and I wouldn't know them."

"Too bad. If we had some chance of picking them out of mug shots, then we'd know their MO—uh—modus operandi. Then we'd know if their specialties are banks or jewelry stores. Oh well, this has been a most interesting lunch anyway." He smiled.

We picked up our checks and I pointed out Nancy, the waitress. He walked over while I stood near the check paying counter. Just by their body actions I could tell that she was giving him the same answers she gave me earlier.

Pender walked back. "It's almost one. We have three and a half hours," he said. "I'll place a few extra men on patrol around that jewelry exhibition." He handed me his card, added, "If you remember anything else about the conversation—anything—give me a call. You see, what we have here as you are already familiar with is a *longshot*." He laughed. "Did you play a lot of longshots in your betting days?"

"No. Doesn't pay. There's a reason why they're longshots." I waved to him as he left and went up to my office. I was feeling better knowing the matter was now in the hands of the police.

Sharon handed me my mes-

sages, but I still was too excited to get back to business. I sat down and stared at my digital clock—1:05 and presently 1:06. As the numbers changed, I found myself wishing it would read 4:30.

To get my mind off of the clock I forced myself to get back to my usual business day. I picked up my first message. It was from smiling Ed Washburne, a client who was on business in New York. There was a number and I dialed direct.

"Mr. Washburne, please." I heard the transferring circuits click and then he came on.

"Hi, Ed."

"Gold? Hey, you forgot to call me here as planned. It's past four o'clock and I told you to call me at three-thirty."

My heart did a fast sprint. "Ed, I'll talk to you later. I'll explain later." I slammed the phone down in the poor man's ear. I'm sure smiling Ed Washburne wasn't smiling now.

I pulled Pender's card from my pocket. I knew it was too soon for him to have gotten back to his office, but I called anyway.

"Lieutenant Pender, please."

"He's out to lunch but will be back shortly. Can I help? I'm Sergeant Rooney."

"Sergeant, tell Lieutenant Pender that Mr. Gold called.

Tell him they're going to steal the *Ramaden* at the V.P. Art Gallery."

"Say, who is this?" Sergeant Rooney asked.

"It's Mr. Gold. Lieutenant Pender will understand. Tell him that the four-thirty time was New York time—that means the robbery is one-thirty here."

"I don't get you?" Sergeant Rooney's voice was filled with exasperation. "Four-thirty where? One-thirty where?"

I looked at the digital clock—1:12. I pleaded with the sergeant, "Tell him to head out quickly to the V.P. Gallery on Lakeland." I hung up and fled past a startled Sharon, who called after me, but I couldn't take the time to talk.

IT WASN'T UNTIL I was seated in a cab that I realized I was doing more than placing a mental bet. I was in the thick of the race. My face flushed with excitement, an excitement I hadn't felt in years. The cab turned onto Lakeland and I looked at my watch. It was one-twenty-five.

As we pulled to the corner where the V.P. Gallery was located, I saw an armored truck just parking at the curb. Two guards moved quickly from the truck and into the gallery. My cab pulled in behind the ar-

mored car. When I paid my fare and stepped to the sidewalk, a big burly policeman ushered my cab away.

I looked inside the gallery from out front through the large store window. The guards were helping strap down the sculpture and all looked peaceful. I looked into the cab of the armored truck and saw the driver calmly scratching his ear—and then the whole picture hit me.

My knees swayed, for I knew the robbery was on. I looked around for the cop but didn't see him. My watch was now at one-thirty and I looked around to see if Pender was showing up. Nothing. There was only one thing for me to do.

I bent down and picked up a heavy rock chipped from the street curb. I closed my eyes and heaved it right through the large gallery window.

Suddenly alarms sounded and a system of gates and bars arose out of the concrete at the front of the gallery, trapping everyone inside. The burly cop came running from somewhere and headed straight for me. He grabbed me and I fell to the walk with his full weight on top of me.

The armored truck revved its engine and took off with wheels squealing. The driver's companions were trying to get through

the iron gates that surrounded them.

The truck reached the intersection just as a squadrol arrived with sirens blasting and lights blazing. The driver of the truck jumped from the cab and fired a shot, but he was quickly pinned by the return fire.

It was over as quickly as it started. I was sitting on the curb, rubbing bruises and scratches, when Lieutenant Pender kneeled next to me. "Say, Gold, you had a very busy day. The way you threw that rock through the window was something. I'll bet you're a juvenile delinquent at heart." He laughed.

"By the way," he continued, "I thought you didn't know what the men looked like, so how did you know the armored truck guards were fake? They hijacked the real guards."

"I didn't know for sure, but I guessed. It was the time difference between New York and here. Once I realized they had synchronized their watches before getting on their plane, then everything followed in logical order."

Pender still looked puzzled. "See, Lieutenant, they planned everything in New York, using their own time and schedule."

"Uh-huh," Pender acknowledged but without fully comprehending. "That's just it, Mr.

Gold, when you called and talked about the time difference to Sergeant Rooney, I figured you were way off. It doesn't make sense for a robbery gang not to set their operation for local time just to avoid a mixup."

"A horse race is still a horse race no matter what time it's run," I answered. "I figure all my races around the country on my own time schedule. It's simpler for me to keep tab. That holds true for any booking parlor. Check on that the next time you bust one."

"Well, you were right," Pender said. "They confessed to having a charter flight in and it was waiting to take them out. They also told us who the big shot is who financed their venture. So we wrapped this one up quick."

As he helped me to my feet he said, "Hey, you didn't answer my question, how did you know that it was the guards who were the crooks?"

I proceeded to demonstrate.

"The driver in the truck scratched his ear. See?" I showed the way he scratched. "See my wristwatch. Well his was showing too. Only his watch read *four-thirty*!"

Pender burst into laughter. "You sure are a great handicapper. By the way, the art gallery is giving you a reward."

"Hey, that's great. I never won before on a longshot!"

Pender slapped me on the back. "They're not charging you for busting their window."

I laughed. "Thank goodness! After all, that wasn't any *two-dollar* window!"

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